

Armies of the Late Roman Empire AD 284 to 476

**Armies of the Late Roman
Empire AD 284 to 476.
History, Organization
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ARMIES OF THE LATE ROMAN EMPIRE

AD 284-476

HISTORY, ORGANIZATION & EQUIPMENT

ARMIES
OF THE
PAST

GABRIELE ESPOSITO

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History, Organization and Equipment

Gabriele Esposito



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The Re-enactors who Contributed to this Book

Gabriele Esposito is a military historian who works as a freelance author and researcher for some of the most important publishing houses in the military history sector. In particular, he is an expert specializing in uniformology: his interests and expertise range from the ancient civilizations to modern post-colonial conflicts. During recent years he has conducted and published several researches on the military history of the Latin American countries, with special attention on the War of the Triple Alliance and the War of the Pacific. He is among the leading experts on the military history of the Italian Wars of Unification and the Spanish Carlist Wars. His books and essays are published on a regular basis by Osprey Publishing, Winged Hussar Publishing and Libreria Editrice Goriziana; he is also the author of numerous military history articles appearing in specialized magazines like *Ancient Warfare Magazine*, *Medieval Warfare Magazine*, *Classic Arms & Militaria Magazine*, *History of War*, *Guerres et Histoire*, *Focus Storia* and *Focus Storia Wars*.

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Introduction

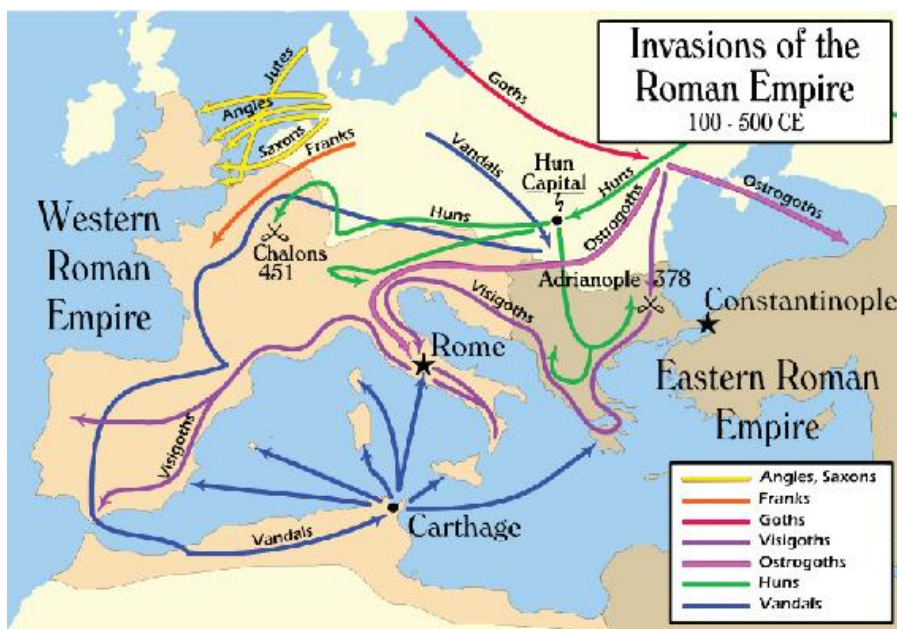
No other army in the history of the world has ever been studied as the Roman one, especially for the late Republican/early Imperial period: during those decades, the Romans were able to conquer a large part of the Mediterranean world, defeating every kind of enemy and showing a military superiority that the world had never seen before. Like all the military powers in the history of the world, the Roman one lived a long period of decay before its complete dissolution: the main aim of this book is describing the Roman Army during the last centuries of its existence. In doing this we will try to show how the general picture of the Late Roman Army we have is partly wrong: the decline of Rome from the third century AD was political, economical and military, but we will see how the military organization of Rome remained quite effective in several aspects until the end of the Empire. No other army in history can be compared to the Roman one in terms of longevity: created by Romulus in 753 BC together with Rome itself, it continued to live until the deposition of Romulus Augustulus in AD 476 (in the West, while in the East the Roman military traditions continued to survive until the fall of Constantinople in 1453). During this long period of more than a millennium, the Roman Army evolved from the tribal military force of a city-state to a complex and gigantic apparatus of an expansionist republic. With the advent of the Principate, the Roman legions brought the *Pax Romana* to most of the Mediterranean world, concluding the long expansionist phase in the history of Rome.

After reaching the peak of its power, the Roman world started to experience some serious troubles: the historical process known as the 'Third Century Crisis' saw the simultaneous eruption of several problems, both internal and external. During those turbulent years, the Roman Empire risked disappearing due to civil wars and external attacks. Despite all these difficulties, the Roman civilization was able to survive and adapt itself to the needs of the new historical situation. Diocletian, with the creation of the Tetrarchy, secured the survival of Rome and started a complex period of internal reforms that would change completely the essence of the Roman Empire. The blow of the 'Third Century Crisis' would have been mortal for any other empire in the history of the world, but it was not for Rome. Thanks to its

flexibility and adaptation, all the main components of the Empire were able to survive and remain effective, most of all the military. The main objective of this book is to show how the Roman Army changed its nature after the defeats of the third century AD, abandoning the previous traditional way of warfare that had given Rome so many victories. The army that had been forged by Caesar and Augustus, based on the complementary functions of the *legiones* and *auxilia*, was in no condition to face the new threats posed by the emerging historical situation: the mass migrations of Germanic peoples and the invasions launched by the centralist Sassanid Empire required new strategic responses in order to be countered in an effective way. For centuries, global military superiority had enabled Rome to expand almost without limits. However, from the fourth century AD, the balance of power gradually changed, obliging the Romans to adopt a defensive attitude in order to protect their Empire and civilization from complete destruction. In the end, we could say that they were quite successful in doing this: for almost two centuries, the invasions of the Germanic peoples were limited as much as possible, while the eastern part of the Empire was able to survive the collapse of the West and later defeat in a definitive way the Sassanids. The picture of Late Roman Army that we generally have, decadent and disorganized, is impossible to conciliate with the great results that we have just described: in fact, as we will try to demonstrate in this book, the Roman Army of the latter centuries was far from being a mass of barbaric mercenaries or poor local levies. Until the very last decades of its existence, it remained well organized and equipped, despite having many problems that will obviously be taken into account in the present study. It is the author's hope that this book will help the reader to have a more updated and complete picture of the Late Roman Army, under three main points of view: history, organization and equipment.



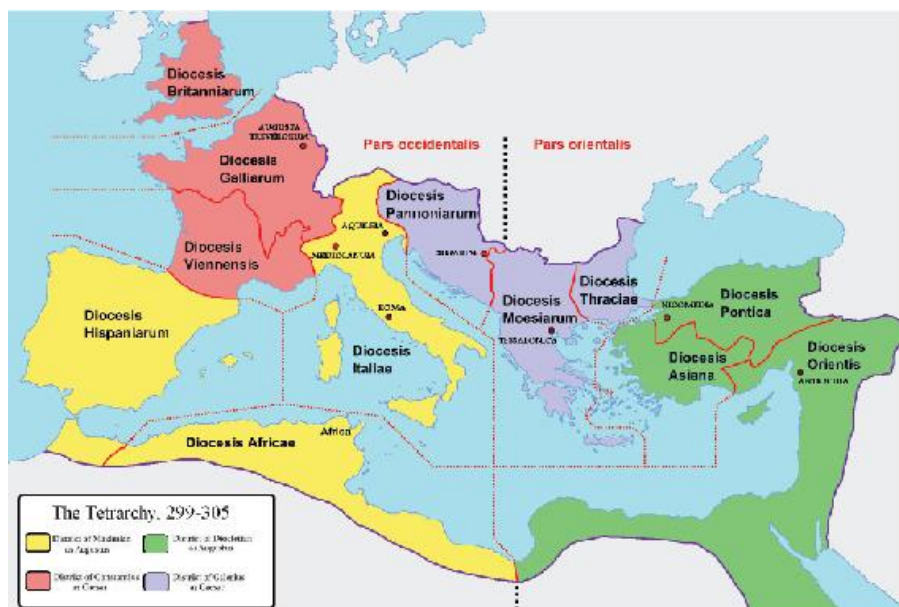
The Roman Empire at its maximum expansion under Trajan, AD 117.
(Map by Wikimedia Commons)



The invasions and migrations submerging the Roman Empire. (Map by Wikimedia Commons)



The Roman Empire and the secessions of the third century AD. (Map by Wikimedia Commons)



The Roman Empire of the Tetrarchy, AD 299–305. (Map by Wikimedia Commons)

Chronology

- 284: Diocletian, son of a Dalmatian slave, becomes Emperor and rules the eastern part of the Empire from Nicomedia.
- 285: Diocletian, after proclaiming himself the human manifestation of Jupiter, reunites the Empire and ends fifty years of civil wars.
- 286: Diocletian appoints Maximian to rule the West, with his capital in Milan.
- 293: Diocletian institutes the system of the Tetrarchy, according to which each emperor chooses his successor ahead of time. Diocletian chooses Galerius, while Maximian chooses Constantius Chlorus.
- 295: The Sassanids invade the Eastern Empire.
- 299: The Sassanids surrender to Galerius, who annexes Armenia, Georgia and Upper Mesopotamia to the Empire.
- 303: Diocletian and Maximian order a general persecution of the Christians, including the destruction of all churches and burning of all Christian books.
- 305: Diocletian and Maximian abdicate in favour of Galerius and Constantius, but civil war erupts again.
- 306: Constantius dies; his son Flavius Valerius Constantinus (Constantine) is acclaimed by his troops as new vice-Emperor of Galerius. The Praetorian Guard appoints Maxentius (Maximian's son) Emperor, instead of Galerius' choice Severus.
- 308: Galerius appoints the new junior Emperor of the East, Licinius.
- 311: Galerius dies, leaving Maxentius and Constantine to fight for the throne of the Western Empire.
- 312: Constantine defeats Maxentius, becoming Emperor of the West, and disbands the Praetorian Guard.
- 313: Constantine's ally Licinius defeats Maxentius' ally Maximinus and becomes co-Emperor in the east. Constantine ends the persecutions of the Christians with the Edict of Milan.

- 314: Constantine defeats Licinius and obtains control over all Roman Europe except Thracia, while Licinius keeps Africa and Asia.
- 323: Constantine decisively defeats Licinius and becomes the sole Roman Emperor.
- 324: Constantine I founds a new city, Constantinople (Byzantium).



Late Roman officer, with muscle cuirass. (*Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme*)

- 330: Constantine I moves the capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople.
- 337: Constantine dies and his sons split the Empire;

Constantine II gets Spain, Britain and Gaul, Constans I Italy, Africa, Macedonia and Greece, and Constantius II the Eastern provinces.

- 338: Constans I, unhappy with the division of power, petitions his brothers to redive the Empire.
- 350: In a military revolt led by the usurper Magnentius, Constans I is murdered by his own troops at the age of 27.
- 353: Constantius II defeats the usurper Magnentius in battle and becomes sole Emperor.
- 360: Pagan general Julian (the 'Apostate') defeats an invasion of barbarians and is declared Emperor by his Germanic troops.
- 363: Julian dies while attempting to invade the Sassanid Empire, which recaptures Nisibis and Armenia. General Valentinian becomes the new Emperor.
- 364: Valentinian delegates Valens as Emperor of the East.
- 376: Fleeing Hunnic aggression, the Goths, under the leadership of Fritigern, cross the Danube and enter the Eastern Empire as political refugees.
- 377: Following harsh treatment by the Romans, the Goths revolt. The beginning of the Gothic War.
- 378: The Visigoths defeat the Romans at the Battle of Adrianople.
- 380: Theodosius I proclaims Christianity as the sole religion of the Roman Empire. The Visigoths defeat the Roman army in Macedonia.
- 382: The Goths and the Empire conclude a peace treaty, according to which the former are allowed to settle along the southern Danube frontier (in the province of Thrace) and are granted significant self-governance.
- 383: Theodosius splits the Empire in two parts (East and West), which are granted to his infant sons Arcadius and Honorius. Civil war erupts against the Western usurper Magnus Maximus.
- 387: Theodosius defeats Magnus Maximus.
- 392: Theodosius fights a civil war against the Western usurper Eugenius.
- 393: Theodosius forbids the Olympic Games and shuts down the temple of Zeus at Olympia.
- 394: Theodosius defeats Eugenius at the Battle of the

Frigidus.

- 395: Theodosius dies and the Empire is divided in a definitive way. Milan is capital of the western half, Constantinople is capital of the eastern one. The two parts of the Empire are granted to Theodosius' minor sons, Arcadius and Honorius, but ruled by their advisors Rufinus and Flavius Stilicho. Alaric unifies the Visigoths in the Balkans and invades Greece.



Late Roman officer, with long stick (a symbol of command in the Roman Army, since the days of the vine-sticks carried by centurions of the Principate). (*Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme*)

- 397: Stilicho attacks Alaric, but is not able to defeat him. The Eastern Emperor signs a deal with the Visigoths.
- 398: Stilicho puts down the revolt of Gildo in Africa.
- 401: Alaric invades Italy, but is defeated by Stilicho.
- 402: The Western Empire moves the capital from Milan to Ravenna.
- 405: Radagaisus leads a Gothic raid into Italy.
- 406: Radagaisus is captured and executed. Vandals and Alans invade France after crossing the Rhine.
- 407: Stilicho stops the Vandals on their way to Italy.
- 408: Stilicho is deposed.
- 409: Vandals and Alans invade Spain.
- 410: The Visigoths sack Rome. The last Roman legions withdraw from England.
- 418: The Emperor grants Visigoths the right to settle in Aquitaine, in return for their military support against Vandals and Alans.
- 425: The Eastern Emperor Theodosius II installs Valentinian III as Emperor of the West.
- 427: Genseric's Vandals cross the Strait of Gibraltar and land in North Africa.
- 430: The Roman Empire signs a first peace treaty with the Huns.
- 435: The Roman Empire signs a second peace treaty with the Huns.
- 439: The Vandals capture Carthage.
- 443: The Burgundians receive official permission to settle in Savoy.
- 450: Theodosius II dies and is succeeded by Marcian, the first Roman Emperor to be crowned by a religious leader (the Patriarch of Constantinople).
- 451: Roman victory at the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains against the Huns.
- 452: The Huns, under command of Attila, invade Italy.
- 453: Death of Attila.
- 455: The Vandals sack Rome.
- 469: Attila's son Dengizich is captured and executed.
- 476: Odoacer, a leader of the Germanic mercenaries in the

service of Rome, deposes the Western Roman Emperor Romulus Augustulus and thus terminates the Western Roman Empire.



Late Roman officer, with *draco* standard. (Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme)

Chapter 1

The Roman Army of the Principate

The legions

To understand the changes that affected the organization of the Roman military forces during the third century AD, it is necessary to present a complete, albeit brief, description of the Roman Army during the centuries of the Principate.¹ Augustus, after the terrible clashes of the civil wars, completely reorganized the Roman military forces and gradually adapted them to the needs of the new political power (represented by him and the following emperors). The core of the army was the legions, composed of professional soldiers: until the Late Republican period, they had been formed of citizens serving in the army according to their economic position, but the civil wars had gradually ended this traditional system of recruitment. The long campaigns of conquest conducted in every corner of the Mediterranean world, and the cruel internecine conflicts, proved to be unsustainable for the traditional Roman society from a military point of view. Until the Second Punic War, the Roman legionaries were all owners of small/moderate farms, who fought for the Roman state in exchange for political representation and defence of their interests. Military activity, however, could not last too long during the year because each soldier was first of all a farmer. Serving in the army was considered to be a great honour, but also only a part-time activity: when the Roman expansionist campaigns started to go past the borders of Italy, these small/moderate landowners found increasing difficulties in serving the state as soldiers. As a result, especially with the military reforms of Gaius Marius, service in the army was gradually also opened to those members of society who had no property and thus no political representation. These men, known as *capite censi*, soon understood that military service was their only opportunity to change their social position; as a result, they progressively became a class of professional fighters, whose only occupation was war. By the time of Julius Caesar, the Roman Army

was almost entirely composed of professional soldiers: these were extremely loyal to their generals, more than to the Roman Republic. Their survival depended upon the decisions of their commander, from whom they received their pay as well as land and property at the end of their career. This situation gradually led to the birth of many 'private' armies, each linked to its commanding general: the two Triumvirates and the civil wars of those years are the perfect representation of this period. Something similar would happen, as we shall see, with the collapse of the central state during the last decades of the Empire. Augustus, after his ascendancy to power, had to change all this and cancel the 'private' dimension of Roman military forces. The legionaries remained professional soldiers, but started to be paid by the central state: the farms given to the veterans were also provided by the imperial administration, and thus the loyalty of the soldiers started to shift from their commanders to the ruling dynasty.

The main military unit was the legion: a large heavy infantry formation, entirely composed of volunteers having Roman citizenship. Each legion included about 5,500 men, divided into one elite *Cohors Prima* and nine 'line' cohorts. The First Cohort, formed by the best soldiers of the legion, had 800 men; the other nine cohorts numbered 480 legionaries each. The *Cohors Prima* had five centuries of 160 men each, while the normal cohorts had six centuries of eighty legionaries each. Each *centuria* was composed of ten smaller units, formed by seven soldiers plus a single NCO known as *decanus* and two non-combatants. This kind of unit, known as a *contubernium*, was the smallest one in the Roman Army. In addition, each legion had its own cavalry component: 120 cavalymen divided into four *turmae*, with thirty soldiers each. Each *turma* was structured on three *decuriae*, the smallest cavalry unit; this included eight soldiers, a *decurio* (the equivalent of the infantry centurion) and an *optio* (acting as NCO). Initially, the major part of the legionaries came from Italy, but as time progressed the provincial elements became increasingly numerous.

The system of ranks of the Roman legion was quite complex but specifically designed to make such a large body of soldiers work effectively. The overall commander of the legion was the *Legatus Legionis*, or Legate, usually a senator appointed by the emperor; as time progressed, however, many members of the *equites* social class became commanders of a legion. The aristocrats of the Senate, who had always dominated Roman military organization, were gradually substituted by the members of the middle classes represented by the *equites*: by the period of the 'Third Century Crisis', this process had reached its full development, to the point that Emperor Gallienus

officially gave command of the legions only to officers coming from the *equites*. If a legion was garrisoned in a province where no other legions were located, its commander was also to act as provincial governor; when performing these functions, he was commonly known as *Legatus Augusti pro praetore*. The second officer in the chain of command was the *Tribunus Laticlavius*, generally a young member of the Senate with no great military experience, who was assigned to the command of a legion in order to learn from the Legate. The third in command was the *Praefectus Castrorum*, who was responsible for the building and defence of the legion's camp; he was a long-serving veteran from the *equites* social class, who had already completed twenty-five years of service and had served as most senior centurion in a legion. His functions included the training of soldiers and new recruits. The group of senior officers was completed by five lower ranking tribunes known as *Tribuni Augusticlavii*: these all came from the equestrian class and already had some military experience. They mainly performed administrative functions and commanded two cohorts each.



Late Roman officer, with *lorica squamata* and 'Berkasovo-I' helmet.
(Photo and copyright by Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio)

The most senior centurion in a legion was called the *Primus Pilus* and commanded the first century of the elite First Cohort. Once in battle, he had the honour to command the entire *Cohors Prima*. The other five centurions of the First Cohort were known as *Primi Ordines* and were considered to be superior in rank to their equivalents of the

other cohorts. The centurions commanding the first centuries of the nine 'line' cohorts were called *Pili Priores* and were superior in rank to the *Primi Ordines* of the First Cohort. Like the *Primus Pilus*, each of these officers took command of his entire cohort in case of battle. Generally speaking, all centurions came from the lower social classes and became officers only thanks to their personal abilities: these experienced veterans were the true backbone of the Roman Army.

The commander of the four cavalry *turmae* was known as *Tribunus Sexmentris*; the decurion commanding each first *decuria* of horsemen had the honour to lead the entire *turma* in battle.

The rank organization of the NCOs was particularly articulated, in order to perform a large range of different functions. Each centurion directly appointed his adjutant and second in command, who was called *Optio*: they performed more or less the same commanding functions as the centurion, but during battle had the important responsibility of remaining at the back of the century in order to keep a close eye on the formation and discourage deserters from abandoning the field. Each *Optio* had an adjutant known as a *Tesserarius*, who was third in the century's chain of command. The *Tesserarius* was keeper of the watchword and performed several important administrative functions. The system of NCOs was completed by the ten *Decani*, each of whom commanded one of the *contubernia* that made up a century. Two auxiliary servants were assigned to each *contubernium*. Common legionaries could perform a series of special duties, which had a specific designation and corresponded to higher pay.² The most important of these was that of *Aquilifer*: the *Aquila* was the legion's standard and represented the valour of the whole unit. Losing the standard was the greatest dishonour that a Roman legion could endure. As a result of this symbolic importance, its bearer was chosen among the most experienced veteran soldiers. Each cohort had its own Vexillum that was carried by a special bearer known as a *Vexillifer*, while each century had its own *Signum* that was carried by a *Signifer*; this consisted of a spear shaft decorated with medallions and topped with an open hand to signify loyalty towards the state. In addition to the above, the *Cohors Prima* had the privilege to carry a special image of the emperor, which was given to an elite bearer known as the *Imaginifer*. Finally, each century had its own military music, consisting of a *Cornicen* or *Bucinator* and a *Tubicen*. All these transmitted orders by playing their instruments, and usually acted in close combination with the *Signifer*, who was a rallying point for all the legionaries. The *Cornicen* played a horn, the *Bucinator* a particular kind of horn known

as a *buccina*, and the *Tubicen* a long trumpet.



Late Roman officer, with *lorica squamata* and *sagum*. (Photo and copyright by *Septimani Seniores*)



Late Roman officer, with *lorica squamata* and *pileus pannonicus*. (Photo

The auxiliaries

As we have seen, the core of the Roman Army were the legions, but these could not perform all the duties required of an army of the time: for example, they lacked light infantry capabilities and had a very limited cavalry component. To fulfill these functions, the Romans used auxiliary units that were formed locally in the various provinces of the Empire. Thanks to this system, the Romans were able to employ all the best military traditions that were present among the peoples living inside the Empire.³ Auxiliaries were not Roman citizens. They served for twenty-five years like the legionaries, but only in their home provinces; at the end of their period of service, they received a farm in their home province and Roman citizenship. As a result, serving in the *auxilia* units was the best way for a provincial to become a Roman citizen and thus notably improve his social position. Thanks to the sacrifices of his father, the son of a provincial auxiliary could enlist in the Roman Army as a legionary. This system, created by Augustus, worked perfectly: a new hereditary class of provincial soldiers was soon formed, with men who were strongly linked to their home provinces but at the same time were extremely loyal to Rome thanks to the opportunity of social improvement that they had received. As time progressed, however, auxiliary units started to be sent to other provinces of the Empire: this happened partly to face military emergencies on the borders and partly to avoid revolts of auxiliary units supported by the population of their own provinces.

Basically, there were three different kinds of *auxilia* units: *cohortes* of just infantry, *alae* of just cavalry and *cohortes equitate*, an infantry cohort with an attached cavalry contingent. The cohorts had the same internal organization and structure as the legionary ones, albeit acting as light infantry units. The *alae* were the proper cavalry of the Roman Army, since the few cavalymen of the legions performed only auxiliary duties for the heavy infantry (like escorting officers, transmitting orders or exploring). The *alae* could be either of heavy or light cavalry, but were all characterized by the great quality of their specific training. The *cohortes equitate*, a mix of infantry and cavalry auxiliaries, were a smaller replica of the larger legions: thanks to the presence of some horsemen they could act as autonomous 'small armies' for service on the frontiers. Each of these three kinds of auxiliary units could have two different establishments, of 500 or 1,000 men. A *cohors quingenaria* had six centuries of eighty soldiers, with a *Praefectus* as commander; a *cohors miliaria* had ten centuries of

eighty soldiers, with a *Tribunus Militum* as commander. The *ala quingenaria* had sixteen *turmae* of thirty men, with a *Praefectus* as commander; the *ala miliaria* had twenty-four *turmae* of thirty men and always a *Praefectus* as commander. A *cohors equitata quingenaria* had six centuries of eighty infantrymen and four *turmae* of thirty cavalrymen, again being commanded by a *Praefectus*; a *cohors equitata miliaria* had ten centuries of eighty infantrymen and eight *turmae* of thirty cavalrymen, being commanded by a *Tribunus Militum*.



Late Roman officer, with *lorica squamata* and *pileus pannonicus*. (Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme)



Late Roman officer, with *lancea* and sculpted greaves. (Photo and



Late Roman naval officer, with *lorica squamata* and *sagum*. (Photo and copyright by Christian Fernandez Gamio)

During military campaigns, the various auxiliary units were attached to the legions, thus coming under direct control of the legions' commanders. Since the Late Republican period, the Roman Army had employed a standard trio of specialised light units: Balearic slingers, Cretan archers and Numidian light cavalymen. With the expansion and consolidation of the Empire, new military traditions were gradually absorbed into the army thanks to the *auxilia* system, like heavily armoured lancers or camel troops. Brief details follow for each of these troop types:

Archers: A substantial number of auxiliary units were defined as *sagittariorum*, being composed of foot or horse archers. The bow had never been an important weapon in Roman warfare, and thus the imperial authorities always made substantial use of archers coming from provinces that had great archery traditions. Mercenaries from Crete were the most employed, since their island was famous in the ancient world for the quality of its archers. Cretan archers were gradually substituted by men from different provinces, more populous than the Greek island: Thrace, Anatolia and Syria. All these boasted strong archery traditions, especially Syria.

Slings: The majority of the Roman Army's slingers came from the Balearic Islands, which were famous during Antiquity for the excellence of their men in the use of slings. Initially employed as mercenaries, the Balearic slingers remained an important component of the Roman Army for a large part of the Principate.

Light cavalry: The bulk of Rome's light mounted troops were initially provided by the provinces of North Africa that were conquered after the Second Punic War. The Berber peoples of the *Numidae* (Numidians) and *Mauri* (Moors) had always fought with exceptionally fast and manoeuvrable cavalry units, which were employed with great success by Hannibal against the Romans (like the Balearic slingers). After Roman conquest, the light horsemen of North Africa became a very important component of the Imperial Army: their main task was to harass the enemy with hit-and-run tactics, but they were also perfect for ambush or pursuit. The light cavalry was also profitably employed for conducting scouting operations. As time progressed, an increasing number of light cavalry *auxilia* units were provided by the Balkan provinces of the Empire, especially Dalmatia. The long wars against the Sassanids and Sarmatians saw the Romans adopting some elements of their enemies' warfare: both the Sassanids and Sarmatians employed large cavalry armies formed by heavily armoured lancers and mounted archers equipped with composite bows. As a result, auxiliary units of eastern horse archers became an increasingly important component of the Roman Army during the last centuries of the Empire. Among the units of light cavalry we should also remember those of the *dromedarii*, camel-riding auxiliaries recruited into the desert provinces of the Roman Empire.⁴ The *Notitia Dignitatum* (a document of the late Roman Empire detailing its administrative organization) lists four *alae* of *dromedarii*; these were all stationed in areas with desert-like climatic conditions. Apparently these light cavalry units were mostly employed to perform patrol duties along the desert frontier. The Romans first encountered camel-mounted troops when they fought against Seleucid King Antiochus III in 190 BC, but it was only during the second century AD that a Roman camel corps was formed. In AD 106, Trajan added to the Empire the new province of Arabia Petraea and thus created the *Ala I Ulpia Dromedariorum Palmyrenorum*, which was formed with camel warriors from Palmyra who had served particularly well under him. In the following decades, the Romans formed various small auxiliary units of *dromedarii*, as these proved very effective in patrolling the desert frontiers of the Empire. Their tasks included escorting convoys, defending the important routes of communication, scouting in the desert, escorting

couriers and battling against desert bandits. They were organized in small squads, with special bases in the desert that provided them with food and water. It has been estimated that during the Late Empire, the Romans had up to 1,000 of these camel-mounted soldiers, mainly recruited from Arabs. They were part of the *limitanei* forces stationed in the Middle East and North Africa.



Late Roman officer, with lamellar armour and *torque*. (Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme)



Late Roman officer, with *pileus pannonicus* and *sagum*. (Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme)



Late Roman officer, with *tunica manicata* and long stick. (Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme)

Heavy cavalry: Being modelled on the Sassanid and Sarmatian heavy cavalry, the Roman *cataphractarii* or *clibanarii* units were all fully armoured, and employed as their main weapon the *contus* (a lance about 4 metres long, which had to be wielded with both hands by the

horseman). The *cataphractarii* were recruited in the western half of the Empire and were influenced by the Sarmatians; the *clibanarii* units were formed in the eastern provinces and were copied from the Sassanid Army. From a practical point of view there was very little difference between them: what we know for sure is that the *clibanarii* used heavier defensive equipment than the cataphracts (especially horse armour). Most of the cataphracts were recruited from the conquered Sarmatians, while the *clibanarii* were generally auxiliaries coming from the eastern provinces bordering with the Sassanid Empire.

The garrison of Rome

Once the Romans completed the conquest of the Empire, they had to face all the problems related to the military defence of such an enormous territory: since the Roman Army was not large enough to garrison all the provinces with the same number of soldiers, most of its units were stationed on the vast borders of the Empire. The frontiers were the only points from which enemy attacks could come, so this defensive disposition of the Roman forces was quite logical. It should be pointed out, however, that in case of disturbances inside the Empire, very few men were available to face such threats. There was no central military reserve and it was practically impossible to take a full legion from its frontier garrison without creating a major gap in the border defences. The only possible solution to this serious problem was that of taking detachments from various legions to form temporary task forces (known as *vexillationes*). As soon as the internal emergency or frontier trouble was resolved, the temporary *vexillatio* was dissolved and its detachments were sent back to their parent legions. A *vexillatio* was usually a mixed force of legionaries and auxiliaries, formed of 1,000 infantrymen and 500 cavalry: two infantry cohorts taken from a legion and a single *ala quingenaria* of mounted auxiliaries.

The military situation for Italy and the city of Rome was quite different from that of the provinces: the capital was the heart of the Empire, where the emperor and the entire central administration were located. According to the reforms of Sulla and to an ancient Roman tradition, no military units could enter the territory of the Italian peninsula without representing a menace to the institutions of Rome: the territory of Italy was thus considered 'sacred' by the Romans, who called it the '*pomerium*'. This corresponded more or less to modern Italy: the Rubicon River in the north and the Straits of Messina in the south were its natural borders. As a result of this situation, Italy could

not be garrisoned by legions or auxiliary units like all the other provinces; obviously, however, the emperor and the city of Rome needed some military forces for protection (especially against internal threats). Augustus resolved this issue relating to Italy by creating the Praetorian Guard. This unit, formally the personal guard of the emperors, was also to act as the garrison of the peninsula.⁵ Initially it was formed with the best soldiers from the legions, so it represented the real elite of the Roman Army. As created by Augustus, and later firmly organized by Tiberius, the Praetorian Guard had nine infantry cohorts: ten would have been the full establishment of a legion, so would have been a clear infraction to the Roman tradition of the 'pomerium' that was formalized by Sulla. Under Augustus, three cohorts were stationed in Rome and the remaining six in other important Italian cities, yet during the reign of Tiberius all the Praetorians were garrisoned in Rome, in the famous barracks known as *Castra Praetoria*.

The whole Praetorian Guard was commanded by a *Praefectus Praetorio*, who came from the ranks of the *equites*. Each single cohort was commanded by a *Tribunus Militum* and had six centuries of eighty soldiers. The original number of nine cohorts, however, was later changed on several occasions: around AD 47 they were increased to twelve and in AD 69 they became sixteen (under Vitellius, who also expanded them from 500 to 1,000 men each). Vespasian reduced the number of cohorts again to nine of 500 men each, while Domitian increased it to ten (setting the definitive establishment that would not change until the final dissolution of the corps). Septimius Severus increased again the number of soldiers for each cohort from 500 to 1,000. Initially all the Praetorians were ex-legionaries from Italy, but with the progress of time the presence of provincials became increasingly important: starting from the reign of Septimius Severus, all the Praetorians started to be ex-legionaries from the provinces. The soldiers of the Praetorian Guard had many privileges compared with the regular legionaries: their period of service lasted for sixteen years instead of twenty-five, and their pay was significantly higher. Trajan also added a cavalry component to the Praetorian Guard, known as *Equites singulares Augusti*: these mounted Praetorians escorted the emperor whenever he left Rome for a military campaign or for a journey in the provinces. The *Equites singulares Augusti* were organized as a normal *ala miliaria*, with twenty-four *turmae* of thirty men and a *Tribunus Militum* as commander. Septimius Severus increased the number of mounted men to 2,000 during his reign. All members of the unit were selected from among the best horsemen of the auxiliary *alae*

and were granted Roman citizenship when enlisting into the Praetorian Guard. Septimius Severus was the first Roman emperor to garrison a legion in Italy, thus not respecting the ancient traditions: in AD 197, he raised three new legions for a campaign against the Parthians, one of which (the *Legio II Parthica*) was later sent back to Italy and deployed in a camp that was located near Rome (Castra Albana). The *II Parthica* was to act both as a strategic reserve to be used in case of emergencies and a security force protecting the emperor from internal rebellions. The legion remained in Italy until the reign of Constantine, who disbanded it together with the Praetorian Guard after his decisive victory at the Milvian Bridge (AD 312).



Late Roman officer in winter service dress. (*Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme*)



Late Roman officer, with *pileus pannonicus* (covered with fur) and

sagum. (Photo and copyright by Fectio)



Late Roman officer, with *tunica manicata* and *sagum*. (Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme)

The military reforms of Augustus that affected the garrison of Italy were not limited to the creation of the Praetorian Guard, since he also created two other corps that were to be stationed in Rome: the

Urbaniciani and the *Vigiles*.⁶ The first were a sort of police, whose main function was to keep order and security in the immense city of Rome. If the Praetorian Guards were the protectors of the emperor, the *Urbaniciani* were the protectors of Rome. While the Praetorian Guard was under direct control of the emperor, the *Urbaniciani* were probably the only Roman military unit still under control of the Senate: their commander, the *Praefectus Urbi*, was in fact a senator. The *Urbaniciani* initially consisted of three cohorts, numbered progressively after the nine cohorts of Praetorians, and each cohort was commanded by a *Tribunus Militum* and had six centuries of eighty soldiers. The original three cohorts were later expanded to seven during the reign of Claudius, while Vitellius increased the size of each cohort to 1,000 men and Septimius Severus to 1,500. In AD 312, the *Urbaniciani* were not disbanded like the Praetorian Guard, but were progressively demilitarized during the following decades. Unlike the Praetorians, the *Urbaniciani* continued to be recruited from Italy throughout their existence.

The other corps created by Augustus and stationed in Rome was the *Vigiles*, a sort of urban guards/firemen. Their main functions were patrolling the streets at night and fighting fires (which could be destructive for a city of the time, as the Great Fire of Rome clearly showed in AD 64). Their commander was known as *Praefectus Vigilum* and came from the *equites*. They were organized in seven *cohortes miliariae* with a total of 7,000 men. Most of their members were *liberti*, i.e. freed slaves of low social condition. Each cohort of the *Vigiles* was commanded by a *Tribunus Militum* and was peculiarly divided into just seven centuries. At that time, the city of Rome was divided into fourteen 'regions', so each cohort of firemen was responsible for the security of two *regiones*. The *Vigiles* were disbanded by Septimius Severus, who absorbed their members into the army.

Augustus also created a small corps of foreign bodyguards to protect his own person: the *Germani corporis custodes*. This unit was a sort of private guard, totally independent from the Praetorians, and was entirely composed of Germanic warriors of the Batavian tribe, who acted as personal protectors of the emperor and his family. Being foreigners, they were totally loyal to the emperor and had no links with the internal political situation of Rome. In AD 9, as a result of the Roman defeat in the Teutoburg Forest, this unit was temporarily disbanded; reformed a few years later, the *Germani corporis custodes* were definitively disbanded by Galba in AD 69 because of their strong loyalty to Nero. Initially there were only around 100 of these Germanic guards, but by the time of Nero they totalled 500. They

were organized in *decuriae*, each led by a decurion.

1. See Baker, P., *The Armies and Enemies of Imperial Rome* (Worthing, Wargames Research Group, 1981).
2. See Esposito, G., *The Late Roman Army* (Point Pleasant, Winged Hussar Publishing, 2016).
3. See Simkins, M., and Embleton, R., *The Roman Army from Hadrian to Constantine* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 1979).
4. See Esposito, G., *The Late Roman Army* (Point Pleasant, Winged Hussar Publishing, 2016).
5. See Rankow, B., and Hook, R., *The Praetorian Guard* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 1994).
6. See Cowan, R., and O'Brogain S., *Roman Guardsman 62 BC-AD 324* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 2014).

Chapter 2

The Transformation of the Third Century

Years of crisis

After several decades of internal prosperity and military expansionism on its borders, the Roman Empire started to experience a general crisis, which affected all its structures, including the military. This turbulent period is commonly known as the 'Crisis of the Third Century' and lasted from AD 235 to the ascension of Diocletian in 284.¹ Conventionally, the assassination of the Emperor Severus Alexander is considered as the starting point of the crisis, but we should point out that the internal and external troubles of the Empire had started long before 235. The first signs of military difficulties, for example, had become apparent during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, when the terrible Marcomannic Wars (AD 166-180) had already shown how the Germanic tribes of northern and central Europe were transforming themselves into a serious menace. Since the reign of Augustus, the Romans had abandoned their ambitions to occupy Germany, but had been able to contain the Germanic peoples and to contain their minor incursions in an effective way. The *limes*, the border between the Roman Empire and the barbarians, had remained quiet and stable. The military supremacy of the Romans had never been contested, and their relations with the Germans had generally remained quite positive.

During the second half of the second century AD, however, this situation changed dramatically as, under pressure from warlike peoples from the steppes of central Asia and eastern Europe, the Germans started to move towards the borders of the Empire. Now, for the first time in their recent history, the Romans had to face massive migrations of entire peoples, not just the small raids of a single tribe. The defensive system based on garrisons of legions and *auxilia* had no chance of containing the massive penetrations of the Germanic peoples now on the move. The border was too vast to be defended in an effective way, since simultaneous attacks from several different tribes became quite common. We could describe these Germanic

peoples as real confederations of tribes, which could assemble a large number of warriors for attacks in a precise sector of the Roman *limes*. During the Marcomannic Wars, the Romans experienced new military difficulties for the first time. They were eventually able to defeat the Germans, but with incredible difficulty and after suffering severe losses. To this we should add the so-called 'Antonine Plague' and the constant state of war on the eastern borders, where the Parthians were always very active in contesting Roman political hegemony. Thanks to the great leadership of Marcus Aurelius, the Empire was able to survive this difficult period, but many questions remained dangerously unresolved.

The immediate successors of Marcus Aurelius, starting with his son Commodus, did very little to improve the general situation. With the ascendancy of the new Severan Dynasty, the existing institutional nature of the Empire was changed: starting from Septimius Severus, the Roman emperors started to be military despots, able to retain power only thanks to the decisive support of the army and of the equestrian class. The traditional respect that the various emperors had always shown towards the Senate started to disappear: the emperor had absolute power and could easily impose his will by the use of violence. The senatorial class gradually lost importance, especially in the military: loyalty towards the supreme leader became increasingly more important than real virtue. Since the soldiers were the real holders of power, emperors started to treat the army as their own private property. Large donatives of money were distributed to the legionaries, the pay was gradually augmented and the number of troops under direct control of the emperor was increased. Septimius Severus was the first to garrison a legion near Rome; after winning the civil war that gave him the Empire, he substituted all the former Praetorians with new men from his legions stationed in Pannonia (legionaries who had proved their loyalty during the recent civil war, fighting on his side). With the addition of the *Legio II Parthica*, Septimius Severus transformed the garrison of Rome into the first 'comitatense' army in the history of the Empire (*comitatus* being a private army under the direct control of the monarch).

Another great political change, happening in the eastern part of the Empire, was to have very important consequences for the military situation of the Romans. In AD 228, the Parthians, who had controlled present-day Iran since the fall of the Seleucid Empire, were decisively defeated by a new Persian dynasty that assumed control of their territories. The new rulers of Iran were the Sassanids, who soon decisively transformed the former Parthian Empire. The Parthians,

from the steppes of central Asia, had created a feudal state that was a confederation of several different regions having great autonomy; the Sassanids, however, soon reorganized the empire as a centralized nation with a strong ruler and single religion. In doing this, they presented themselves as the real heirs of the ancient Persians, who had created a solid and immense multinational empire. As a result of all these changes, the eastern part of the Roman Empire started to be menaced by a new threat that was much more dangerous than the Parthians. The Sassanids had a political organization that was in many aspects very similar to that of the Romans, and thus could confront the Roman Empire on almost equal terms.² If the Parthians had generally limited themselves to raids and guerrilla campaigns, the Sassanids were ready to launch full-scale invasions of the rich provinces in the East under Roman control.

From the ascendancy of the new dynasty, the state of war on the eastern *limes* was almost continuous. In 260, the Emperor Valerian was defeated in battle and captured by the Sassanids, starting one of the worst periods in the long history of Rome. With no more central authority to speak of, the Empire risked disappearing forever as a result of the internal secessions and external invasions. Thousands and thousands of Germanic warriors entered the Roman borders and laid waste to large areas of the northern provinces, while the Sassanids found no opposition in their occupation of huge parts of the eastern territories. At this point, to face the foreign invasions in a much more effective way, two large parts of the Empire abandoned the central government and started to act as independent political bodies. The territories of modern France, Britain and Spain proclaimed their independence as the 'Gallic Empire', while most of the eastern provinces were absorbed into the Kingdom of Palmyra. Until the rise of the Sassanids, the desert city of Palmyra had been a small client state of Rome, having a great commercial importance but a very limited political one. The defeat of Valerian, however, changed all this very quickly: Odenatus, the King of Palmyra, was very intelligent in taking the opportunity of using this political vacuum to enlarge his territories. He presented himself as the legitimate defender of Roman interests in the East, because of his alliance with Rome: thanks to this function, he was able to unite most of the eastern provinces under his direct control and launch a strong counter-offensive against the Sassanids. Judging the secessions of the third century from a historical point of view, we could say that it was only thanks to them that the Roman Empire was able to survive. The division of the imperial territories enabled the local leaders and military forces to put up a

better defence against foreign invasions. This was the case in Gaul, where the usurper Postumus was able to defeat the Germans; more or less the same also happened in Syria and Egypt, where Odenatus contained the Sassanid advances. The 'Gallic Empire' remained an independent state during the period 260-274, while the Kingdom of Palmyra acted as a free country from 261–272. Both the secessions were resolved by Emperor Aurelianus, who was also able to fight Rome's external enemies in an effective way. The period of the 'Third Century Crisis' is also known as the 'Military Anarchy', because it saw total chaos in the successions of emperors that was caused by the increasing power of the military. From the reign of Septimius Severus, the Roman emperors started to be chosen by the Praetorian Guard or the Army, with a certain degree of normality. The dynastic principle, which had worked quite well until then, was completely abandoned after the assassination of Severus Alexander (who was killed by his own troops): the legions, which were now mostly commanded by officers from the *equites* social class, began to kill or proclaim emperors according to their own interests. It was enough to offer a large donative to the Praetorians or the legionaries in order to obtain the throne, while it only took a reduction in the pay of soldiers to be deposed or killed. The weakness of the senatorial class and the continuous state of military emergency gave all political powers to the military leaders, something that would end only with the ascendancy of Diocletian in 284.



Late Roman officer, with *cingulum militiae* and *spatha*. (Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme)



Late Roman heavy infantryman with *lorica hamata*. (Photo and copyright by *Contubernium Primum*)



Late Roman heavy infantryman with *lorica hamata*. (Photo and copyright by *Contubernium Primum*)

Years of change

While, for reasons of space, the present study will focus specifically on the military changes that affected the Roman Army during the third century, we should bear in mind that Roman society as a whole changed in a dramatic way. The crisis was not only a political or military one: first of all it seriously reduced the demographic capabilities of the Empire, especially due to the human losses caused by terrible epidemics. Economy and commerce were severely damaged, while the traditional Roman way of life also had to change in a notable way. New religions became gradually dominant and Roman society completely changed its internal organization. Traditionally, since the Late Republic, the Romans had developed a social structure that was based on three main classes: aristocracy (senatorial families), *equites* (more or less a middle class) and the plebs (the lowest social group). The enormous difficulties of the crisis reduced the number of social classes from three to two: the richest members of society – the aristocracy and the most wealthy *equites* – started to form a new group known as *honestiores*; whilst the modest *equites* and the plebs started to be known as *humiliores*. In practice, the crisis had cancelled the middle class: the inhabitants of the Empire were now extremely rich or extremely poor. The most important *equites* had transformed themselves into a new ruling class, gradually making the aristocracy of the senators more marginal. Obviously this had very serious effects on the leadership of the army, as we shall see.

To all this we should add another important social change, which happened before the beginning of the crisis: in AD 212, the *Constitutio Antoniana* of Caracalla gave Roman citizenship to all the inhabitants of the Empire. As previously described, the Roman military organization was based on the distinction between citizens and non-citizens: with the *Constitutio Antoniana*, the main social difference between legionaries and auxiliaries was cancelled. Caracalla also eliminated the main motivation behind the enlistment of the auxiliaries: provincial men had no more need to serve in the army for many years in order to obtain Roman citizenship.

Finally, it is important to note how the crisis had a deep impact on the urban centres of the Empire: many historians have defined Roman civilization as an ‘empire of the cities’, because urban centres were the real core of the Roman state. The crisis changed all this. The large, open and rich cities of the previous decades were progressively abandoned due to the fear of foreign attacks; new smaller cities started to be built, which were protected by defensive walls and thus were much more isolated and poor than before. The city of Rome was encircled by new walls, construction of which began under Emperor

Aurelian.

As we will see, the real reform that created the organization of the Late Roman Army was initiated by Diocletian and completed by Constantine. Gallienus, however, is commonly considered as the first emperor who understood that the military organization created by Augustus had to be completely changed in order to have an effective defence of the Empire.³ The traditional structure consisting of legions and *auxilia* units was too static to deal with the massive migrations of Germanic peoples or the large-scale invasions of the Sassanids. In addition, civil unrest and internal threats had to be taken into consideration. Until the beginning of the crisis, the Roman Army had only been used to fight on the frontiers, but the experiences of the internal secessions had clearly shown the need to also use the armed forces to perform policing functions. One of the consequences of the crisis had been the birth of a new phenomenon of internal unrest, a sort of brigandage that saw the formation of large bands of insurgents/criminals (commonly known as *Bagaudes*). As a result, the army had to be ready to maintain public order. The *Constitutio Antoniana*, finally, had practically cancelled any possible future for the *auxilia* system.

Gallienus tried to face and resolve all these problems, starting with the defence of the frontiers. The idea of a static line of defence had been totally surpassed by events: the Empire needed central reserves of highly mobile troops, which could move very rapidly and thus meet different menaces in several parts of the *limes*. The only units that could deploy such mobility were cavalry ones: the legionary or auxiliary infantry garrisoned on the borders had no chance of fighting with success against simultaneous threats. Gallienus initially created four small cavalry reserves, located in strategic parts of the Empire: Mediolanum in northern Italy, Sirmium in Serbia, Poetovio in Slovenia and Lychnidos in Macedonia. Over time, the two centres of Mediolanum and Sirmium became the most important areas, where two large strategic reserves of cavalry were stationed. The troops in Mediolanum were ready to counter any emergency menacing Italy; those in Sirmium were ready to act on the long Danubian *limes*. As a result of Gallienus' cavalry reforms, mounted units quickly became much more important than before. As we have already seen, the Romans had never considered cavalry a very important part of their military forces. However, the *Constitutio Antoniana* had transformed all provincials into Roman citizens, and thus new cavalry units could easily be recruited in all provinces of the Empire. The collapse of the *auxilia* system and the contemporary expansion of the cavalry led to

the birth of several new categories of mounted troops, which made up the new strategic reserves and had some innovative characteristics.⁴

Before analysing these new troop types, however, it is important to understand the other military reforms produced by Gallienus. These mostly affected the leadership of the army: the senatorial class was formally excluded from any form of military service. The aristocracy, which for centuries had controlled the entire Roman military machine, was in such a state of decay that an emperor could assign command of the whole military apparatus to the richest members of the *equites*. In effect, Gallienus did nothing revolutionary, merely transforming an informal practice into a formal one. Since the time of Marcus Aurelius, senators had gradually and voluntarily abandoned the role of the legions' commanders, preferring to dedicate themselves to much more lucrative activities like trading. The traditional ethos of the Roman aristocrats had disappeared together with the ancestral values of the Roman society: luckily for Rome, this important heritage was accepted by the equestrians of the new *honestiores*, who were ready to take the place of the senators in the ranks of the army. The *Legatus Legionis* was substituted by the *Praefectus Legionis*, a member of the *equites*. It should be pointed out, however, that both of Gallienus' most important military reforms had already been made on a smaller scale by Septimius Severus: the basic idea of creating a central and strategic reserve of troops can be traced in the location of the *Legio II Parthica* near Rome; whilst the ascendancy of the *Praefectus Legionis* as commander of the legion had already been applied during the raising of the three new legions created for the Parthian expedition of Septimius Severus. The general expansion of cavalry was not limited to the creation of new separate mounted units, but also involved the transformation of legionary cavalry. Since the time of Augustus, the cavalry of each legion consisted of 120 horsemen divided into four *turmae* of thirty soldiers. With the reform of Gallienus, the cavalry of each legion was expanded to the establishment of an 'ala miliaria' (twenty-four *turmae* of thirty men, for a total of 720 horsemen). As a result, the cavalry component became much more important. The new types of cavalry unit created by Gallienus were the direct heirs of the former mounted *auxilia*. Very little is known about their internal organization, but what we know for sure is that they all assumed the general denomination of *vexillationes*. From the reign of Gallienus, this term was not used to identify detachments taken from the legions; the *vexillatio* was now the standard cavalry unit, which could be formed by different kinds of *equites* (cavalrymen).



Late Roman heavy infantrymen with round shield and *lancea*. (Photo and copyright by Cohors Prima Gallica)



Late Roman heavy infantryman with *lorica squamata*. (Photo and copyright by *Contubernium Primum*)



Late Roman heavy infantryman with *lorica squamata*. (Photo and copyright by Contubernium Primum)

The following new categories of *equites* were created by Gallienus:

***Equites Dalmatae*:** Like all the new cavalry *vexillationes* created by Gallienus, these originated as detachments of existing mounted units (both legionary cavalry and *auxilia*) that were separated from their

parent corps and thus constituted new independent units. It is highly probable that this process was caused by the military emergency suffered by the Roman Empire during the reign of Gallienus: with the division of the Empire due to the two large secessions of Gaul and Palmyra, only the central territories of Italy and the Balkans remained under direct control of Gallienus.⁵ As a result, many detachments coming from Gaul or the eastern part of the Empire that were temporarily stationed in the Balkans found themselves isolated from their parent units. Gallienus transformed them into independent units, and thus the term *vexillationes* gradually started to indicate independent mounted units. The *Equites Dalmatae* were probably the first new category of cavalrymen to be formed, since they were quite numerous: the *Notitia Dignitatum*, several decades after Gallienus' cavalry reform, lists forty-eight units of this kind (thirty-one in the Western Empire and seventeen in the East). The term *Dalmatae* has no specific ethnic meaning, because it was simply used to indicate the geographical provenance of these units: they were originally stationed in the region of Dalmatia (a broad term, including most of the Balkan provinces), but were composed of soldiers coming from every corner of the Empire. It would be totally wrong to think that these units were entirely raised from inhabitants of the Balkan provinces, as this would not explain the survival of such units after the end of the 'Third Century Crisis' military emergency. It is true that the Balkan provinces were the real military core of Gallienus' truncated Empire, but these could not deploy such a large number of cavalry units alone. Over time, the original detachments stationed in the Balkan provinces under Gallienus started to be located in other areas of the Empire: apparently, however, they retained their original denomination of *Dalmatae* to show that they had formerly been part of Gallienus' forces. During the terrible years of the secessions, the emperor had to face a severe military crisis and thus was obliged to use all the military resources that were available in the territories under his control. Apparently the *Equites Dalmatae* also started to be garrisoned in other regions of the Empire as a result of the great military reforms of Diocletian and Constantine. They were permanently assigned to the garrisons of frontier provinces as highly mobile cavalry forces that could deal with enemy incursions.

***Equites Illyriciani*:** These had the exact same origin as the *Equites Dalmatae*, but were originally stationed in a different geographical area. While the *Equites Dalmatae* were detachments garrisoned in Dalmatia, the *Equites Illyriciani* came from Illyricum. Dalmatia and Illyricum were the heart of the Danubian provinces in the Balkans,

where many *vexillationes* from other areas of the Empire were located. When Gallienus had to build up a new army from his truncated territories, he used cavalry detachments as the backbone of his new military forces and transformed them into independent units. The *Notitia Dignitatum* lists twenty-three units of *Equites Illyriciani*, garrisoned in various border provinces of the Empire. Like the *Equites Dalmatae*, they started to be used as frontier cavalry during the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine.

***Equites stablesiani*:** Their history and development was the same as the *Equites Dalmatae* and *Equites Illyriciani*, the only difference being the regional provenance of the units. While the previous two categories of troops were formed by converting detachments that were stationed in Dalmatia or Illyricum, the *Equites stablesiani* were created by converting the *vexillationes* garrisoned in northern Italy into independent cavalry units. As stated above, Italy and the Balkan provinces were the only territories that remained under the direct control of Gallienus: if we look at the original four strategic cavalry reserves created by the emperor, we can clearly see that they were located in northern Italy and the Balkans: Mediolanum in northern Italy, Sirmium in Serbia, Poetovio in Slovenia and Lychnidos in Macedonia. It is thus reasonable to suppose that the *Equites stablesiani* were based in Mediolanum, the *Equites Dalmatae* in Sirmium and Poetovio, and the *Equites Illyriciani* in Lychnidos. The term *stablesiani* comes from the particular title of *stabulensis* that was given by Gallienus to Aureolus, who was the first commander of the strategic cavalry reserve based in Mediolanum. *Stabulensis* has a merely honorific meaning, denoting Aureolus as the senior officer in charge of the imperial stables. The *Notitia Dignitatum* lists nine units of *Equites stablesiani* in the Western Empire and seven in the Eastern Empire. Mirroring the similar units of *Dalmatae* and *Illyriciani*, the *Equites stablesiani* later became frontier cavalry.

***Equites promoti*:** As already stated, Gallienus augmented the numerical composition of the legionary cavalry with the establishment of an *ala miliaria* (twenty-four *turmae* of thirty men each, for a total of 720 horsemen). As a result, the cavalry of each legion now had the necessary numbers to act in a more independent way. During the military emergency caused by the invasions of the Germanic tribes and the internal secessions, Gallienus transformed several units of legionary cavalry into independent ones: that is the reason why these were known as ‘promoted’. It is reasonable to suppose that the *Equites promoti* retained their original unit organization, at least initially. The

Notitia Dignitatum lists thirty-one units of *Equites promoti*, with eleven in the Western Empire and twenty in the East. Like the other new cavalry units created by Gallienus, the *Equites promoti* were progressively garrisoned in all the provinces of the Empire and used as frontier cavalry.

***Equites indigenae*:** During the early centuries of the Empire, the great majority of the Roman Army's cavalry had been made up of provincial auxiliaries, but when the *Constitutio Antoniana* gave Roman citizenship also to all provincials, the status of these auxiliary cavalry forces suddenly changed. Most of the cavalry units formed by raising local elements in the various provinces started to be defined as *indigenae* (indigenous), thus abandoning their auxiliary status but retaining their local nature. In total, the *Notitia Dignitatum* lists thirty-eight units of 'native cavalry', stationed in every corner of the Empire (mostly on the frontiers). Every province had its own units of native cavalymen, who were presumably strongly influenced by the local military traditions of their territories. The field armies of the Late Empire did not include units of *Equites indigenae*, thus confirming the local nature of these horsemen.

***Equites Mauri*, *Equites scutarii*, *Equites sagittarii*:** These three categories of cavalymen were not directly related to the reforms of Gallienus, but they are discussed here because they were part of the new cavalry organization that emerged after the reforms of the late third century.⁶ As we have previously seen, Moorish light horsemen had been a fundamental component of the Roman Army's auxiliary cavalry for some time. Their role was particularly important during the campaigns against the Parthians and Sassanids in the East, because they were excellent skirmishers armed with javelins and mounted on fast horses, the perfect Roman tactical response to the large numbers of horse archers deployed by the Parthians and Sassanids. While Cretan archers and Balearic slingers gradually lost their prominence during the central centuries of the Empire, the Moorish light cavalymen remained the elite, even after the 'Crisis of the Third Century'. As a result, although the *auxilia* system had long disappeared, we find ten Moorish light cavalry units listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum*: these were garrisoned in different areas of the Empire and formed a distinct category of troops (separate from that of the *Equites indigenae* even in the provinces of North Africa, the home of the Moorish tribes). The existence of a specific denomination for Moorish units confirms the high consideration that the Romans had of them, especially during a period that was characterized by a strong

need for new light units (both mounted and on foot). The *Notitia Dignitatum* also includes eight units of Moorish infantry, a clear signal of the fact that the *Mauri* fighters were highly appreciated as foot skirmishers too. The *Equites scutarii* are a category of mounted troops of which we know very little: the term *scutarii* does not mean that they were all equipped with shields, because during the last centuries of the Empire it was used to indicate 'guard' units. It is thus plausible to presume that the seventeen units of *Equites scutarii* listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* acted as mounted bodyguards, although we have no clear idea of their effective functions. Maybe they were used as the mounted escort of high-ranking officers, like the *Scholae Palatinae* created by Constantine to replace the Praetorians as the guard of the emperors. Finally, a brief word on the *Equites sagittarii*. As we have seen, the difficult wars against the Sarmatians and Sassanids convinced the Romans to include horse archers in their army. These new units were commonly known as *Equites sagittarii* and were formed in all the provinces of the Empire; the *Notitia Dignitatum* mentions seventeen of them in the West and thirty-four in the East.

The reforms of the third century, however, were not limited to the cavalry. The legionary infantry was also deeply affected by them, especially the light troops. The Roman Army had long employed provincial soldiers to form the majority of its light infantry units, but it should not be forgotten that the legions also comprised a certain number of lightly equipped infantrymen. During the Republican period, the legions had traditionally deployed a specific class of light infantry skirmishers known as *velites*. With the reforms of Gaius Marius, the internal organization of the legions was completely changed and the *velites* were abolished together with the other existing classes of legionaries. The need for light infantrymen, however, soon led to the creation of a new class of skirmishers within the legions. These were known as *antesignani* and we have trace of them from the times of Caesar. Basically, the *antesignani* could be defined as elite light infantrymen who made up the vanguard of each legion. They were frequently used for special missions and carried lighter equipment than the normal heavy infantry legionaries. They were not part of the heavy infantry formation and used small oval shields instead of the bigger ones carried by standard legionaries. During marches, their main functions were those of exploring territory and protecting the flanks of the legion; in battle, they countered the missile troops of the enemy and supported the cavalry during its attacks thanks to their superior mobility. In many respects, the *antesignani* of the legions were the Roman equivalent of the *hypaspists*

employed by the Macedonian phalanx. It is important to note that, despite their important functions, the *antesignani* did not exist as a separate corps inside the legions. They were not a standing unit, but were drawn from the ranks of the normal cohorts when tactical considerations demanded it. Their assignments, albeit vital, were always temporary. The *antesignani* were usually drawn from the youngest and fittest legionaries of each cohort, in order to perform special missions that needed a high level of mobility.



Late Roman heavy infantrymen with *lorica squamata*. (Photo and copyright by *Contubernium Primum*)

During the third century, particularly under the reign of Septimius Severus, the light infantry component of the legions started to be increasingly important and acquired a stable organization.⁷ Apparently, the first legions to have a fixed number of light infantrymen, who performed as skirmishers on a permanent basis, were the three new ones created by Septimius Severus for his Parthian campaign. Since their first encounters with the Parthian mounted archers, the Romans had clearly suffered from a lack of missile troops inside their heavy infantry formations. It appears that Septimius Severus tried to resolve this problem by including a fixed number of light infantrymen in his three elite legions. According to the new structure, each cohort of the legion was now to include two centuries

of light infantry and four of heavy infantry (the elite *Cohors Prima* had two centuries of light infantry and three of heavy infantry). The transformation of two centuries from heavy to light infantry clearly shows the increasing need for missile troops. The new light infantrymen started to be known as *lanciarii*, from the name of their main weapon (the *lancea*). Quite frequently, all the centuries of *lanciarii* included in a legion could be brigaded together and detached to act independently. This means that, like the former *antesignani*, they were also considered as elite troops. Over time, however, the *lanciarii* gradually transformed themselves into elite guard units and partly abandoned their original nature of light infantry soldiers. By the time of Diocletian, they had completed this transformation and started to be grouped in large independent units. By the time of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, the Roman Army included nine legions entirely formed by *lanciarii*: four in the western half and five in the eastern.



Late Roman heavy infantryman with *lancea* and *verutum*. (Photo and copyright by Patrick Stritter)



Late Roman heavy infantryman with *lorica squamata* and lancea.
(Photo and copyright by Fectio)



Late Roman heavy infantryman in defensive posture. (*Photo and copyright by Fectio*)

Finally, we should note that during the turbulent decades of the third century, the Roman generals started to make an increasing use of irregular units entirely composed of barbarian warriors. Germanic warriors were generally very happy to serve in the Roman Army as mercenaries, but were always quite reluctant to integrate themselves into regular military units. As a result, the Romans created two new kinds of military units made up only of barbarian fighters: the infantry *numerus* and cavalry *cuneus*. During the following centuries, such units were also opened to Romans and started to receive a more formal internal organization. During the third and early fourth centuries, however, they remained ‘semi-regular’ units of barbarians. Apparently, neither the *numerus* nor *cuneus* had any standard structure to speak of; the groups of German warriors could be very numerous or quite few, and usually had no internal subdivisions. What we know for sure is that members of the *numeri* and *cunei* fought in their own style and often under their own chieftains (who contracted their services with the Roman military authorities). Initially these units of hired barbarians were mostly employed along the borders, as a supplement to the *auxilia* guarding the frontier. They eventually became increasingly numerous and important, transforming themselves into a significant part of the Roman military forces.⁸

1. See Elliot, P., *Legions in Crisis: Transformation of the Roman Soldier AD 192–284* (Stroud, Fonthill Media, 2014).
2. See Farrokh, K., *The Armies of Ancient Persia: the Sassanians* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2014).
3. See Esposito, G., *The Late Roman Army* (Point Pleasant, Winged Hussar Publishing, 2016).
4. See Elliot, P., *Legions in Crisis: Transformation of the Roman Soldier AD 192-284* (Stroud, Fonthill Media, 2014).
5. See Esposito, G., *The Late Roman Army* (Point Pleasant, Winged Hussar Publishing, 2016).
6. See MacDowall, S., *Late Roman Cavalryman AD 236-565* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 1995).
7. See Baker, P., *The Armies and Enemies of Imperial Rome* (Worthing, Wargames Research Group, 1981).
8. See Simkins, M., and Embleton, R., *The Roman Army from Hadrian to Constantine* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 1979).

Chapter 3

The Great Reforms of Diocletian and Constantine

The Roman Army of the Tetrarchy

The long 'Crisis of the Third Century' ended only with the ascension to power of Diocletian in AD 284. The Empire had endured decades of internal unrest, civil wars, secessions and foreign invasions. Roman civilization had survived and the Empire had retained territorial unity, but all the institutions of the state were experiencing severe difficulties. Diocletian quickly understood that the political and military structures of the Empire had to be completely reformed in order to survive: the political organization based on centralism and the military organization based on the legions were of no use against the new internal and external threats that were menacing the stability of the Empire. First of all, Diocletian decided to find an alternative to the excessive centralism of the Roman administrative apparatus, which had been among the main causes behind the ineffective military response to the foreign invasions and the secessions of Gaul and Palmyra. He then gradually developed the innovative system known as the 'Tetrarchy', the main aim of which was avoiding succession wars when an emperor died. Since the dynastic system of succession had proved totally inadequate for the new era, Diocletian decided to determine imperial succession according to the adoption principle. Each ruling emperor was now to choose his own heir soon after assuming power, in order to avoid internecine conflicts. Future emperors had to be chosen according to their personal valour and military virtues, for the benefit of the Roman state. In addition, the whole Empire was divided into four parts, ruled by two senior emperors and two junior emperors. Each senior emperor, known as 'Augustus', controlled one half of the Empire; in addition, each selected his own successor, who was known as 'Caesar' (junior emperor). Each half of the Empire was divided into two parts: one ruled by the 'Augustus' and one by the 'Caesar'. Formally, the senior emperor had a certain control over the junior one, but it is generally true to say that the Empire was effectively divided in four smaller

‘sub-empires’ with autonomous administrative structures.

The Tetrarchy of Diocletian was a very intelligent response to several political problems, mainly that of succession. When an ‘Augustus’ died or retired, the ‘Caesar’ that he had chosen took his place and nominated a new junior emperor; apparently there was no more space for civil wars. Similarly, the causes of secessions had been practically cancelled, as each of the four parts of the Empire had its own supreme leader and administrative apparatus, thus augmenting the efficiency of defence in case of foreign invasion. The old administrative division based on provinces was abolished, being substituted with a new one that saw the organization of the territory into twelve dioceses. The four parts of the Empire ruled by the tetrarchs were known as ‘praetorian prefectures’, each of which was to include three dioceses. All these changes notably simplified the internal organization of the Empire, especially from a military point of view: flexibility and adaptability were the key elements for success, the only way to face multiple and simultaneous threats. Each of the dioceses was ruled by a governor known as a *vicarius*, while each of the praetorian prefectures was governed by an ‘Augustus’ or ‘Caesar’, with the decisive support of a chief-of-staff known as a *praefectus praetorio*. From a military point of view, the reforms of Diocletian were revolutionary and highly effective. First of all, he decided to separate the military apparatus from the administrative one: he did this in all sectors of the state, from the lowest to the top of the imperial command structure. The senatorial class had controlled both the military and civil administrations for centuries, but the specific needs of the times had gradually shown all the deficiencies of this system. Both the army and civil administration now required high levels of specialization, which forced Diocletian to create separate careers and formative activities.⁹ The military would have been in the hands of the *equites*, who were already in command of all major units since the time of Gallienus; the civil administration remained under the control of the senatorial class, which now had more specific economic and social functions.



Late Roman heavy infantryman with *plumbatae* carried on the back of the shield. (Photo and copyright by Fectio)



Late Roman heavy infantryman with *draco* standard. (Photo and copyright by Fectio)



Late Roman heavy infantryman with lamellar armour and Spangenhelm. (*Photo and copyright by Contubernium Primum*)

The great reform of Constantine

Constantine became supreme ruler of the Western Empire in AD 312 after defeating Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Some years later, he would also defeat the legitimate Eastern emperor, thus

uniting again all the territories of the Empire under the power of a single monarch. In many respects, Constantine is considered to be the last great emperor of Rome, largely because his own conversion led to the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of Rome. It is the opinion of several historians, however, that his most important reforms were military ones. Constantine was the first emperor after Augustus who completely changed the structure of the Roman military forces. His first such act, after defeating Maxentius, was to disband the Praetorian Guard: this was something epochal, that no one had seriously attempted before him. For almost three centuries, the Praetorians had frequently decided the destiny of Rome, by killing emperors or electing new ones. Now this incredibly powerful military institution was ended, as a result of the Praetorian Guard's choice to side with Maxentius during his war against Constantine. Constantine transferred the capital of the Empire from Rome to the new city of Constantinople that he had recently founded, with the result that the existence of a strong imperial guard based in Rome no longer made sense.

The corrupted Praetorians were replaced by new units of mounted guardsmen known as *Scholae Palatinae*, which guaranteed a highly mobile escort service to the emperor and when he was on campaign (the Praetorian Guard cavalry was limited to the *Equites singulares Augusti*).¹⁰ At the time of Diocletian, the term *schola* was commonly used to indicate an organized component of the imperial retinue, civil or military: each of these components, in fact, had its own specific chamber (*schola*) in the imperial palace. Later, the term started to be used to indicate the mounted regiments forming the imperial guard. Each *Schola Palatina* was an elite cavalry *vexillatio*, having the same internal organization as normal mounted units. As we will see later, the standard *vexillatio* of the Late Roman Army had the same internal structure as the former *ala quingenaria* (sixteen *turmae* of thirty men). Each *Schola* was commanded by a *Tribunus Militum*; unlike the Praetorian Guard, the *Scholae* had no overall military commander because the emperor retained direct control over them. Initially there were five *Scholae*, but when the Empire was again divided into two parts after the death of Constantine their number was augmented to ten (five for each half of the Empire). The original units started to be defined as *seniores*, while the newly formed ones were known as *iuniores*. These terms were also largely used after the definitive division of the Empire in 395, when many of the most important military units were duplicated: the original ones, generally remaining in the Western Empire, were called *seniores*, and the new ones were

known as *iuniores*. By the time of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, the organization of the *Scholae Palatinae* had changed again: they included eight units in the Western Empire and seven in the Eastern Empire. Since the *Scholae Palatinae* had the delicate function of protecting the emperor, their men were generally chosen among Germanic recruits: Franks and Alemanni in the Western Empire, Goths in the Eastern Empire. After the crushing Roman defeat of Adrianople, however, the Goth guardsmen of the eastern emperors were gradually substituted with recruits from Armenia and Isauria. The best elements of the *Scholae Palatinae*, in total just forty men, were detached from their units in order to form the small personal guard of the emperor. They were chosen for their loyalty and were known as *Candidati* because of their bright white tunics. They were commanded by an officer known as a *primicerius* and followed the Emperor every single moment of the day (including on campaign).

Due to their guard status, the members of the *Scholae Palatinae* had a series of privileges similar to the former Praetorian Guard. They received higher pay than regular soldiers and enjoyed special treatment (they received extra rations of food and were exempt from some taxes). During the age of Constantine, the *Scholae Palatinae* were the real elite of the Roman Army, but this situation gradually changed over time. The ease of palace life and the lack of actual campaigning reduced the combat abilities of these guardsmen, transforming them into parade-ground soldiers. At a certain point it even became possible to buy an appointment into the ranks of the *Scholae Palatinae*, something considered unacceptable in the time of Constantine. Especially in Constantinople, the units of *Scholae Palatinae* were increasingly filled with well-connected members of the young nobility, whose only aim was to improve their social status by obtaining new privileges. This state of decay led to the abolition of the eastern *Scholae Palatinae* in 468; in the Western Empire, however, they were retained, even by Odoacer, but later disbanded by Theodoric. Emperor Leo I, who abolished them in the East, substituted them with a new corps of imperial bodyguards known as *Excubitores* (their name more or less meaning 'sentinels'). These numbered 300 men, mostly recruited from the sturdy and warlike Isaurians in order to counterbalance the increasing influence of Germanic warriors in the eastern military forces. The *Excubitores* were garrisoned in the imperial palace and thus had an important function in the city of Constantinople.

After the abolition of the Praetorian Guard, Constantine organized another corps of imperial guardsmen with different functions from the

Scholae Palatinae. These were known as *Protectores* and served both as bodyguards and staff officers, and were all junior officers who were chosen by the emperor because of their great personal abilities. The *Protectores* included both foot and mounted guardsmen; the latter were also known as *Domestici*, in order to be distinguished from the foot bodyguards who were simply called *Protectores*. The commanding officer of the foot guards was known as *comes domesticorum peditum*, while the commander of the mounted guards was called *comes domesticorum equitum*. The foot guards were organized into an *auxilium*, while the mounted guards were grouped into a *vexillatio*. All the *Protectores* were under direct command of a senior officer known as *comes domesticorum*. When the Empire was definitively divided in two parts, the *Protectores* were doubled, like many other units. Like the members of the *Scholae*, the *Protectores* were mostly of Germanic origin and generally came from the equestrian class. Because of their extreme loyalty, they were frequently used for special missions by the emperor, who could send them across the Empire as his own 'personal agents'. When serving in such special missions, the *Protectores* were commonly defined as *deputati*. In many respects, the corps of the *Protectores* worked as a sort of general staff/military academy, as service in the unit was used to form the most brilliant junior officers. After a few years of service in the *Protectores*, a member of the unit was generally granted a commission by the emperor and placed in command of a military unit. Originally, the title of 'protector' was introduced during the reign of Gallienus, being given to individual officers as a mark of their devotion towards the emperor (mostly *tribuni* or centurions). After being awarded with this honorific title, officers were likely to receive accelerated promotion in their service. The original *Protectores* can be described as a sort of military order attached to the personal general staff of the emperor. After the reign of Gallienus, the *Protectores* gradually transformed into a proper military unit, in a process that was fully completed under Constantine.

After reforming the guard units, Constantine initiated a complete transformation of the whole Roman Army. The basic idea was to create a new fundamental distinction between military units, with the field armies separated from the border troops.¹¹ The field armies would have been garrisoned in the major cities of the Empire, as highly mobile strategic reserves, while the border troops were based along the *limes*, serving as the first line of defence against foreign attacks. In practice, the reform was based on the new principle of defence in depth. In the event of simultaneous attacks on various points of the border, the border troops were to stop the enemies for

just a few hours or days, whilst the field armies would have been rapidly assembled and sent against the invaders. This new system had a great advantage: the presence of the field armies in the major cities of the Empire was very important for the internal security of the territories, because these elite troops could easily be used to crush rebellions or secessions. By the time of Constantine, internal stability was as important as defence against foreign invasions. As a result of these new principles, all the military units of the Roman Army were divided into two large categories: the *comitatenses* (field troops) and *limitanei* (border troops). In many respects, the *comitatenses* were the direct heirs of the former legions, while the *limitanei* had some characteristics in common with the former auxiliaries. *Comitatenses* were all the units which made up a field army, known as *comitatus*; *limitanei* were all the units stationed on the border (*limes*). The former were elite troops with excellent equipment and training, mostly legions or cavalry *vexillationes*; the latter were organized into smaller units with a strong local character, usually showing a high degree of foreign influence (many units of *limitanei* were equipped more or less as their direct enemies, similarly to the former *auxilia*).

The *limitanei* were obviously much more static than the *comitatenses* and were strongly linked to the defensive positions that they had to protect (they were part border police and part garrison militia). The *limitanei* were also the perfect troops to counter small incursions or skirmishing activities: most of the Roman border regions were characterized by an endemic state of low-intensity conflict, something that the *limitanei* were prepared to face on a daily basis. Generally, the *limitanei* had lighter equipment than the *comitatenses* and enjoyed fewer privileges (like tax exemptions) than the field troops. At the end of their service, however, they received some land located near the border that they had defended for most of their lives. Analysing this important element, it is possible to suppose that Constantine wanted to create a whole new class of soldier-colonists: the *limitanei* would have been defenders of the frontiers with a strong personal link to the border lands of the Empire. This view is confirmed by the fact that by the time of Constantine, the profession of soldier had become mostly hereditary, so members of the *limitanei* would have passed their land properties to their sons and protection of the borders would have been guaranteed by these 'military families'. According to their functions, the *limitanei* could assume some special denominations: if they were stationed on the Rhine or Danubian frontiers, they were commonly known as *riparienses* (because their tract of frontier was marked by rivers); if they were garrisoned in

large border forts, they were known as *castellani*; if they were placed in smaller fortlets or watchtowers, they were known as *burgarii*.¹² On special occasions, for example during a military emergency or for a large campaign, some units of *limitanei* could be attached to the *comitatenses*. In this case they received the designation of *pseudocomitatenses*; their period of service with the field troops was generally quite limited, but on some occasions the best units of *pseudocomitatenses* could remain attached to the field armies for as long as their existence.

The *comitatenses* were grouped in several field armies, located across the regions of the Empire. There was, however, a special category of field army, the *comitatus praesentalis* (literally ‘the army in the imperial presence’). The *comitatus praesentalis* was the emperor’s own field army, which was under his direct control, while each of the other field armies was commanded by a senior officer known as a *magister militum*, who was assisted by a *magister peditum* (commander of the infantry) and *magister equitum* (commander of the cavalry). As time progressed, the *comitatus praesentalis* started to be commanded by a *magister militum* like all the other field armies. Smaller field armies, instead, started to be commanded by a senior officer known as a *comes*, and all the *limitanei* of a certain border region were under command of a *dux*. Both the *comes* and the *dux* were subordinates to the *magister militum*. The most senior units of the *comitatenses* field armies were known as *palatini*, which could be legions, cavalry *vexillationes* or *auxilia palatina*. The latter were elite light infantry units created by Constantine by converting the semi-regular *numeri* of Germanic warriors into proper regular corps. The *auxilia palatina* were generally named after the barbarian tribe from which they had been recruited, but some could be named after the emperor who had organized them.



Late Roman *Draconarius* with leather 'muscle cuirass'. (Photo and copyright by Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio)



Late Roman heavy infantryman with leather 'muscle cuirass' and two javelins of the *verutum* model. (Photo and copyright by *Contubernium Primum*)



Late Roman heavy infantryman with padded *subarmalis* and *lancea*.
(Photo and copyright by Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio)

Unit organization

After the great reform of Constantine, the legion remained the basic unit of the Roman infantry. It should be noted, however, that its numerical strength and internal composition were greatly changed. Until the 'Crisis of the Third Century', the legions had acted more or less as truly independent 'little armies', with their own cavalry and artillery; after the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine, they lost this peculiar character and their numerical strength was notably reduced. Most of the legions created or reorganized by Diocletian and Constantine derived from former *vexillationes* (detachments of the legions) and thus the average number of their soldiers was more or less 1,000-1,200.¹³ In addition, they had no more cavalry or artillery components inside their structure. The new legion of the Late Roman Army was commanded by a *Tribunus* coming from the equestrian class, who usually had passed through the ranks of the *Protectores* (a sort of combined imperial bodyguard and staff college). The *Tribunus* was assisted by the *Primicerius*, his second in command: this new term was nothing other than a new version of the earlier *Primus Pilus*. The *Primicerius* was an ex-ranker with considerable length of service, who had entered the officer corps because of his experience as a veteran but had not been part of the *Protectores*.

The previous internal organization of cohorts had been completely abandoned, since each legion was now structured on six *ordines*, each of which included two centuries of legionaries. As a result, each *ordo* was to number 200 men and the whole legion was to include 1,200 soldiers. Each *ordo* was commanded by an officer known as a *Ducenarius*, who could also be known as 'Senator' if he had already been chosen for service in the *Protectores* and was thus waiting for a vacancy in the ranks of the imperial staff college. Despite its name, the rank of 'Senator' had nothing to do with the senatorial class. The first *centuria* of each *ordo* was commanded by the same *Ducenarius*, while the second one was under the orders of a *Centenarius* (the equivalent of the previous centurion). Both the *Ducenarius* and the *Centenarius* directly appointed their adjutant and second in command, who was called a *Biarchus* and performed more or less the same command functions as the former *Optio*, such as remaining at the back of the century in order to keep close formation and discourage deserters from abandoning the field. As previously, each century contained ten *contubernia*, each now commanded by an NCO known as a *semissalis*, the equivalent of the former *decanus*. The majority of the legions were part of the *comitatenses* troops, but some of them were *limitanei*. As previously stated, the *auxilia palatina* were elite units of light infantry, generally performing special duties and having peculiar equipment;

their organization was similar to that of the heavy infantry legions, but they numbered just 500-600 men each (half the strength of a legion). Each *auxilia palatina* included just three *ordines*, with two centuries each. The chain of command and the internal organization of each *ordo* were exactly the same as in the legions. The majority of the *auxilia palatina* were composed of light infantrymen armed with small shields and javelins, but we have notice of some units entirely formed by foot archers. Among the legions of the Late Roman Army, two had a special status: the *Ioviani* and the *Herculiani*, later split between *seniores* and *iuniores* with the final division of the Empire. After ascending to power, Diocletian and his co-Emperor Maximian were respectively equated to the Roman gods Jove and Hercules; in order to secure their position and counter-balance the power of the Praetorian Guard stationed in Rome, they promoted two faithful legions from the region of Illyricum (the *Legio V Iovia* and *Legio VI Herculia*) to be their personal guards. As a result of their promotion, the two legions were renamed *Ioviani* and *Herculiani* (from the honorific titles of Diocletian and Maximian). With the reform of Constantine, the two legions lost their guard status, but continued to be considered as elite units.

Most of the *limitanei* units were structured as independent cohorts, thus retaining the previous model of organization. The cohort of the Late Roman Army included six centuries of eighty men each, for a total of 480 soldiers. Each cohort was commanded by a *Tribunus*, who was assisted by a *Primicerius*, as in the legions. Each century was at the orders of an *Ordinarius*, who was the equivalent of the *Ducenarius* or *Centenarius* from the legions (but who had fewer privileges than them). Each *Ordinarius* was assisted by a *Biarchus* and commanded ten *contubernia*. Around the middle of the fifth century, however, most of the *limitanei* infantry units were transformed from cohorts into *numeri*. As we have seen, the *numerus* was originally created as a semi-regular unit of barbarians with no proper internal organization; during the last decades of the Empire, however, it gradually acquired a more stable structure. The *numeri* continued to be units mostly formed by barbarians and retained their characteristic 'local' nature as part of the *limitanei*. Now, however, they were organized in eight centuries with eighty men each (a total of 640 soldiers). Each *numerus* was commanded by a *Tribunus*, who had a *Primicerius* as his second in command. The eight centuries of each *numerus* were assembled into four. Each *ordo* was commanded by a *Ducenarius*, but unlike the legion each century of the *numerus* was under the orders of its own *Centenarius* (the *Ducenarius* did not command the first century of each

ordo). To sum up, we could say that the infantry of the *comitatenses* were organized in legions and *auxilia palatina*; the infantry of the *limitanei*, however, was organized in cohorts and *numeri*.

The basic cavalry unit of the *comitatenses* was, as we have already seen, the *vexillatio*, which initially had the same internal organization as the light infantry *auxilia palatina*. It included 500-600 cavalrymen, structured on three *ordines* with two centuries each. The chain of command and the internal organization of each *ordo* were exactly the same as in the legions.¹⁴ With the final subdivision of the Empire, however, most of the cavalry *vexillationes* were divided in two, as were most of the other units. In AD 395, most of the infantry units were also split into two, but each half was then recruited back up to its original strength; the half located in the Western Empire added the term *seniores* to its name, while the half in the Eastern Empire received the name *iuniores*. This process was very common for all *comitatenses* infantry units, be they legions or *auxilia palatina*, but the organization of the *limitanei* was not affected by the division of the Empire because of the local nature of these border units. Regarding cavalry, the division of the Empire had different results: after being halved, the *vexillationes* did not recruit back up to their original strength and kept their reduced numerical force of just 300 horsemen each. Like the infantry units, the *vexillationes* of the Western Empire were generally known as *seniores* and those of the Eastern Empire *iuniores*. Since each cavalry *vexillatio* now numbered just 300 men, the internal organization had to be changed. Each of them was now to include ten *turmae* of thirty men. Each *vexillatio* was commanded by a *Tribunus*. The cavalry of the *limitanei*, instead, comprised two kinds of units: the *alae* and the *cunei*. If the border infantry had retained the cohort, the border cavalry preserved the *ala*, and during the last decades of the Empire this included 600 horsemen and was structured on twenty *turmae* of thirty men each. Each *ala* was commanded by a *Tribunus*. Around the middle of the fifth century, most of the *limitanei* cavalry units were changed from *alae* into *cunei*. As stated earlier, the *cuneus* was originally created as a semi-regular unit of barbarians with no proper internal organization, but during the last decades of the Empire it gradually acquired a more stable structure. The *cunei* continued to be units mostly formed by barbarians and retained their characteristic 'local' nature as part of the *limitanei*; now, however, they were organized as ten *turmae* of thirty men (like the *vexillationes* of the *comitatenses* cavalry). Each *cuneus* was commanded by a *Tribunus*.

It is interesting to note that during this period, the Roman Army started to have some independent artillery units, probably the first of

this kind in the military history of the world. Until the ‘Crisis of the Third Century’, each legion had deployed its own artillery: each cohort was responsible for a stone-throwing *ballista* and each century was responsible for a bolt-shooter *scorpio*. In total, a single Roman legion could deploy an impressive artillery detachment with ten heavy *ballistae* and fifty-nine light *scorpiones*.¹⁵ Around AD 250, the *ballistae* of each cohort started to be replaced with a heavier model of stone-thrower known as an *onager*, a catapult specifically designed for siege operations. The artillery of each legion was manned by very few specialists, since most of the crews were provided by the ordinary rankers. After the reforms of Constantine, however, this situation was completely changed. The new smaller legions did not have their own artillery detachments, because all the legionary artillerymen from the various units were assembled together in order to form new and independent ‘artillery legions’. These specialized units were known as *ballistarii*. It seems that in the beginning there was just one such legion, which was part of the *comitatenses*. Later, with the division of the Empire in 395, this unit, like others, was divided between *seniores* and *iuniores*. By the time of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, however, the Roman field armies included six ‘artillery legions’: *Ballistarii seniores*, *Ballistarii iuniores*, *Ballistarii Dafnenses*, *Ballistarii Theodosiaci* and *Ballistarii Theodosiani iuniores* in the Eastern Empire, and *Ballistarii* in the Western Empire. Only three of these units were of *comitatenses*: the *Ballistarii Dafnenses* and the two original ‘artillery legions’ (the *Ballistarii seniores* and *Ballistarii iuniores*). The remaining three artillery units were *pseudocomitatenses* coming from the *limitanei* and had been promoted in order to serve with the field armies. It is highly probable that these units were formed by collecting together garrison artillerymen who manned the defensive fortifications located on the *limes*; the *Notitia Dignitatum* also lists an artillery unit of *limitanei* known as *Milites ballistarii*.



Late Roman *Tubicen* with padded *subarmalis*. (Photo and copyright by *Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio*)



Late Roman heavy infantryman with partial *lorica squamata*. (Photo and copyright by Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio)



Soldier of the *Tervingi*, an ‘*auxilia palatina*’ unit listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* as part of the *Comitatus Praesentalis II* in the Eastern Empire. (Photo and copyright by *Septimani Seniores*)

Recruitment

During the Principate, both legionaries and auxiliaries were all *voluntarii* (volunteers). Compulsory conscription did exist in the Roman Army, but it was used only very rarely by the authorities of the Empire. Generally speaking, the practice of conscription, which was known as *dilectus*, was used only in case of military emergencies or during the preparation of major campaigns for which large numbers of additional troops were required. This situation changed completely after the 'Crisis of the Third Century', and the Roman Army relied mainly on compulsion for the recruitment of citizens by the time of Constantine. The reforms of Diocletian made military professions hereditary: the sons of serving soldiers or veterans were required by law to enlist, in order to continue the service of their fathers. In addition to this, all citizens of the Empire were subject to a regular annual levy that was based on a principle known as *indictio* (a sort of land tax assessment). Each landowner living in the territory of the Empire was required to provide a certain number of recruits to the Imperial Army, the number of which was defined according to the amount of land tax that was due on each landowner's estates. Obviously this second channel of recruitment was strongly contested by various rich landowners, who preferred to keep their best men on their estates (for work or for their private defence). In order to replace their best men, landowners often sent the less fit or reliable men at their disposal. As an alternative, they could also cheat the authorities by sending sons of soldiers (who were already obliged to serve) or vagabonds (known as *vagi*). The principle of the *indictio* could be used only in the countryside: it mostly involved peasant recruits and affected the local power of landowners. In the urban centres, this land-based conscription did not apply. As a result, the contribution of the cities to the defence of the Empire was extremely poor during the Late Empire. Landowners were also frequently able to convert the conscription requirements into a cash levy (having a fixed rate per recruit due). This was known as *aureum tironicum*, from the word *tirones* which means 'recruits'. The various regions of the Empire contributed in different ways to the formation of Rome's military forces. The traditional recruiting areas of Gaul and the Balkans, for example, continued to provide the bulk of the Roman Army's recruits.

During the last decades of the Empire, the traditional height and age requirements of the Principate were progressively abandoned, with the result that the general quality of soldiers saw a dramatic decline. After being accepted into the Roman Army, each new recruit was marked on one of his arms with a specific brand in order to

discourage desertion, which became an enormous problem during the last decades of the Western Empire. Each new recruit was issued with an identification disc that was worn around the neck, and was also given a certificate of enlistment that was known as a *probatoria*. The best recruits were obviously generally assigned to the *comitatenses*, while men having an inferior level of fitness were placed with the static units of *limitanei*. The standard period of service was twenty years in the *comitatenses* and twenty-four years in the *limitanei*; in this respect, the change from the time of legionaries and *auxilia* had not been particularly significant. All the difficulties relating to recruiting described above had obvious consequences on the strength of single units. As we have seen, the military units of the Late Empire were notably smaller than those of the Principate (especially the legions). Despite this, there was always a massive disparity between official and actual strengths, with units on the field generally much smaller than their theoretical establishment.



Soldier of the *Equites Honoriani Taifali Iuniores*, one of the *vexillationes comitatenses* listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* as part of the *Comes Galliae* in the Western Empire. (Photo and copyright by *Septimani*)

Seniores)



Late Roman light infantrymen with *lancea* and *verutum*. (Photo and copyright by *Cohors Prima Gallica*)



Late Roman archer with composite bow. (*Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme*)

***Buccellarii, laeti, foederati*: the ascendancy of the barbarians**

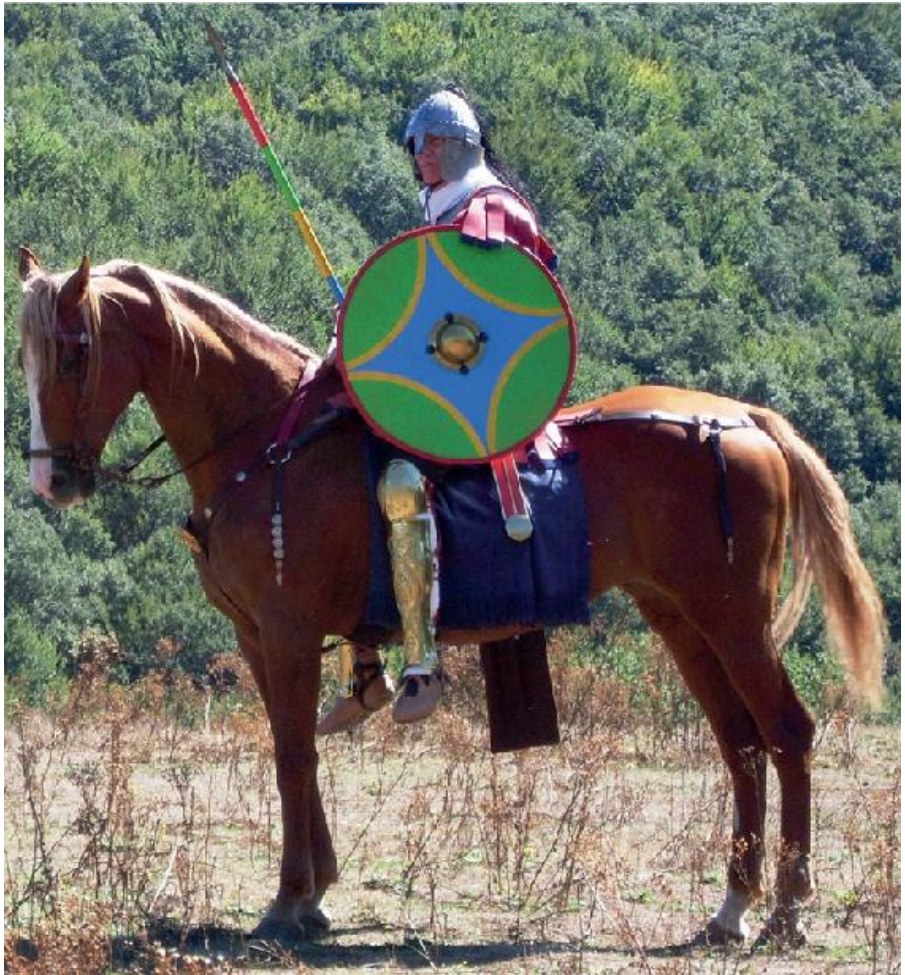
The last decades of the Roman Army were characterized by an important process that is commonly known as ‘barbarization’. Over time, the armed forces reformed by Constantine started to include an increasing number of irregular military units formed by Germanic warriors. Generally speaking, the foreign irregulars serving in the Roman Army could belong to three different categories: the *buccellarii* (mercenaries), *laeti* (settler-soldiers) and *foederati* (allies).¹⁶ After the defeat of Adrianople against the Goths, many important Roman military commanders started to expand the forces under their command by recruiting large contingents of Germanic mercenaries. These soldiers were recruited singularly or in groups and were assembled into units that were under the direct orders of their employers. More or less each *Magister Militum* started to have several units of mercenaries among his forces; these Germanic troops, directly paid by their employer, generally proved to be very loyal towards the various Roman officers, but had no bonds with the emperor or with the central administration of the state. In practical terms, several ‘private armies’ had flourished within the Roman Empire. The use of *buccellarii* became even more widespread over the years. Many Roman nobles, especially in the provinces, started to assemble security forces made up of Germanic mercenaries, and since the central state was in great difficulty, many rich landowners preferred to use foreign professional soldiers to protect their private properties. The term *buccellarii* derives from the word *buccellatum*, a type of dry biscuit that was the ordinary ration of these Germanic mercenaries. With the arrival of the Huns in Eastern Europe, some important Roman generals like Flavius Aetius started to employ hundreds of them as *buccellarii*. Sometimes these private bodyguards could be converted into regular military units, such as the *Placidi Valentiniaci felices* who had been originally recruited as mercenaries by the empress Galla Placidia and were later converted into an *auxilia palatina*. The units of *buccellarii* did not have a proper military organization, but during the last years of the Empire they became better trained and equipped than many regular units. If serving a rich general or noble, they were more motivated than regular soldiers. The practice of using *buccellarii* continued after the fall of the Western Empire: Justinian’s most important general, Belisarius, had hundreds of mercenaries at his service during the campaigns of reconquest conducted in the West.¹⁷

The term *laeti* defines communities of barbarians that were permitted to settle on imperial territory in exchange for military service in the Roman Army. This recruiting system was initially used with defeated tribes, who were absorbed inside the Empire in order to

be always under control. The first *laeti* communities appeared during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, who granted some lands to the Germanic tribes defeated during the Marcomannic Wars. The 'Antonine Plague' had depopulated large areas of the Empire, reducing much of the recruiting potential of Rome. This first experiment of Marcus Aurelius, however, was not a great success: the defeated Germanic warriors soon rose in revolt and even seized for a brief period the important city of Ravenna (one of the most important bases used by the Roman Navy). Each community of barbarians that wished to enter imperial territory had to conclude an agreement with the Roman authorities that prescribed a series of obligations and sometimes also privileges. The *Notitia Dignitatum* lists several groups of *laeti*, who could also be known as *gentiles* (the two terms were used with no particular distinctions). The agreement granting land to a community of barbarians might specify a once-and-for-all contribution of recruits or a fixed number of recruits required each year. The lands given to Germanic settlers were known as *terrae laeticae* and were not part of the normal provincial administration, since they were under direct control of a specific military officer (known as a *Praefectus Laetorum* or *Praefectus Gentilium*). There is still considerable dispute among scholars about the military organization of the *laeti*: it is not clear if these barbarian recruits formed their own distinct military formations or if they were simply absorbed into existing units. The second hypothesis, however, seems to be the most plausible, as the *Praefecti Laetorum* were just administrative officers controlling the communities of foreign settlers, but had no units of barbarians under their command. The *Notitia Dignitatum* contains two lists of *Praefecti Laetorum*, one for Gaul and one for Italy. Apparently, a large number of *laeti* settlements were not made up by Germanic colonists but by Sarmatian ones. We don't have detailed information about these Sarmatian colonies, especially regarding their origins. They could have been formed by Marcus Aurelius after the defeat of the Sarmatians during the Marcomannic Wars (as part of the first *laeti* settlements), or may have been created with groups of Sarmatians who entered the territories of the Empire due to the pressure of migrating populations like the Goths or Huns. Considering the military peculiarities of the Sarmatians, it is highly probable that these recruits were employed as heavy cavalrymen in the mounted units of cataphracts.

Foederati were all those tribes that were allied to Rome due to the terms of a treaty (*foedus*). Generally speaking, tribes of *foederati* were provided with benefits by Rome in exchange for military assistance.

Their loyalty towards the Empire, however, was not very sincere: most of the early *foederati*, for example the Franks or Goths, later transformed themselves into fully-independent ‘barbarian nations’ located within Roman territories. On some rare occasions, the military collaboration between Rome and the Germanic allies had positive results, such as when Flavius Aetius defeated Attila’s Huns at the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains. In the majority of the cases, however, the Germanic tribes accepted a *foedus* just to enter the Roman Empire and then create their own independent realm. Obviously, from an organizational point of view, the contingents of *foederati* were commanded by their own leaders and retained their peculiar military traditions.



Late Roman cavalryman, with *lancea* and javelins. (Photo and copyright by Cohors Prima Gallica)

Strategy and tactics

During the glorious days of the Principate, the Romans had usually employed a general defensive strategy that is commonly known as ‘forward defence’, whereby the legions, stationed on the frontiers of the Empire, had always neutralized imminent enemy incursions or invasions before they could reach the territories of Rome.¹⁸ This strategy had proved to be very effective on several occasions, mainly thanks to the creation of strategic salients beyond the *limes* (frontier). This system of defence, however, had been created to contrast the low intensity raids of Germanic tribes or the invasions of regular Parthian/Sassanid armies: it was not suited to stop mass migrations of entire peoples, like those that occurred on the Rhine and Danube frontiers from the reign of Marcus Aurelius onwards. At the end of the second century AD, the Roman military machine was completely taken by surprise with this new kind of threat. The generals of Marcus Aurelius had to struggle for years against the Germanic tribes in order to repulse their invasions, suffering very heavy losses that shattered the basic structure of the legions. After these dramatic events, it soon became clear to successive imperial military leaders that a diffused defence of the borders was no more the right response to foreign menaces. As a result, Gallienus and the following emperors started to create large reserves of highly mobile troops that were stationed around the major cities of the Empire (being also ready to suppress another new kind of menace, the internal rebellions and usurpations). The ‘forward defence’ was by now too vulnerable. The migrating Germanic tribes could easily concentrate many thousands of warriors at a precise point of the frontier, which was usually defended by a single legion with its relative auxiliary units. The lack of reserves to the rear of the border meant that a foreign invading force could penetrate very deeply into the Empire before Roman reinforcements from other border garrisons could arrive to intercept it.

The new defensive strategy created by Gallienus and developed by his successors is commonly known as ‘defence in depth’. The Romans accepted that their frontier provinces would become the main combat zone in military operations conducted against the barbarians, rather than the enemy lands located across the border. If the previous ‘forward defence’ had been based on the principle that the best defence is a preventive offence, the new strategy was much more passive and abandoned any possibility of territorial expansion by Rome. This change of general strategy was completed during the crucial years that saw the great military reforms of Diocletian and Constantine. The creation of *comitatenses* and *limitanei* was

fundamental in this sense: the immense borders of the Empire continued to be protected by garrisons, but these were now formed by static troops having purely defensive functions. The *limitanei* did not have the capability or equipment to launch preventive offensives against Rome's enemies; their main role was that of countering small raids and incursions, which became very common during the continuous low-intensity conflicts happening on the *limes*. In the case of large invasions by migrating peoples, the *limitanei* had to avoid direct confrontation with the enemy: they just had to keep their defensive positions and structures located on the border in order to slow down the advance of the invaders. The time gained by the *limitanei* was of fundamental importance for the *comitatenses*, who were usually quickly assembled by the imperial authorities and sent against the enemies who had penetrated the border. As a result of this standard practice, the decisive battle was to be fought inside the Roman province that had been attacked (sometimes in a location that was near to the border, but on other occasions near a major urban centre where the *comitatenses* were garrisoned). The auxiliaries of the Principate, according to the previous principle of 'forward defence', had great offensive capabilities compared with the *limitanei* of the Late Empire. Generally speaking, the *auxilia* were also much better equipped and more numerous than the later static troops. As we have seen, among the *comitatenses* forces there was also the *comitatus praesentis* (the personal army of the emperor). This could be used like all the other field armies to counter foreign invasions, but its main function was that of defeating any attempt of rebellion or usurpation against the emperor. After the end of the third century, secessions and civil wars remained quite common in the Roman world. The new system of defence was also supplemented by a series of alliance treaties that were stipulated with the various tribes or client states located on the Roman borders. These treaties of mutual support were based on a very simple principle: the Romans promised to defend their local ally from attacks by its neighbours, and in return the local ally vowed to refrain from raiding the imperial territories.

Regarding tactics, the most important change of this era was the ascendancy of cavalry. For many centuries, since the days of the Greek hoplites who fought against the Persians in the fifth century BC, the armies of the Mediterranean world had seen a clear prominence of infantry over cavalry. The Romans had conquered immense territories with the power of their legions, exporting their political control thanks to the superiority of the legionary heavy infantryman.¹⁹ But the epochal events happening during the Late Empire were to change

all this, leading to the progressive decay of the long tradition of infantry warfare. Contact with new military civilizations, like those of the Sarmatians and Sassanids that both originated in the Iranic territories, led the Romans to adopt new tactical principles. These were mostly employed as a response to the new military threats faced after the third century, so they were strongly linked with the adoption of the new 'defence in depth' strategy. As we have already detailed, under Gallienus, cavalry increased significantly from a numerical point of view: until that time it had been a secondary element of the Roman military apparatus, formed only by small contingents of legionary cavalry or units of auxiliaries. During the Principate, mounted units represented more or less 20 per cent of the Roman Army, but by the beginning of the fifth century, cavalry units had grown to represent approximately 35 per cent of the army.

Taking over tactical prominence from the infantry did not have only numerical consequences: the general status of mounted forces was also deeply affected by the tactical changes. In general, the Roman generals of the Late Empire usually preferred to avoid large pitched battles, unlike what happened during the Principate. This was mainly due to the recruiting problems previously described and to the economic difficulties of the Empire. Replacing the losses suffered by the elite *comitatenses* armies was difficult, especially if these losses affected cavalry contingents. Producing equipment and breeding horses for the cavalry was very expensive. Losing thousands of *comitatenses* in a single battle was not sustainable, because it meant being militarily very weak for several years to come. As is clear from this picture, the main reasons behind the need of avoiding pitched battles were practical ones; this need should not be interpreted as a sign of military inferiority, because the Late Roman armies were able to win most of the field battles fought against barbarians during the third and fourth centuries. The Roman military superiority was not as strong as in the days of the Principate, but compared with the Germanic tribes or the Sassanids, the elite *comitatenses* retained a superior level of training and organization. In order to minimise casualties, the generals of the Late Empire had several tactical options at their disposal: night attacks, ambushes, surprise raids, harassment and strategic manoeuvring.

The effective development of pitched battles, however, was not so different from that of the great field clashes during the Principate: the main tactical innovations were related to the use of new categories of troops like cataphracts or mounted archers. The heavy infantry of the legions was drawn up in a main line, which was usually straight and

several ranks deep, whilst light infantry (*auxilia palatina*) and light cavalry (mostly mounted archers) were stationed in skirmishing formation in front of the main infantry line. Heavy cavalry formed the wings, while archers and slingers were deployed at the back of the heavy infantry line. The disposition of the army was completed by a large reserve, having variable strength and including infantry or cavalry units, located to the rear of the main line, in order to deal with breaches opened by the enemy in the heavy infantry or to exploit any kind of tactical opportunity. Generally, each army deployed in the field had its camp in the rear; this was guarded by a small garrison and could have different levels of fortification. The camp contained the baggage of the army and could act as a refuge in case of rout. Generally speaking, the defences of the camps of the Late Roman Army were of lesser quality and complexity compared with those built by the armies of Caesar or Augustus. A ditch was generally dug around the perimeter of the camp and the resulting spoil was used to erect a rampart. The latter was topped with a palisade of sharpened wooden stakes that were arranged to form a defensive screen.



Late Roman cavalryman, with *lorica hamata* and *Spangenhelm*. (Photo and copyright by *Cohors Prima Gallica*)

In battle, the screen of light infantry and light cavalry would loose their missiles on the enemy before the decisive engagement of the infantry lines. After performing this purely skirmishing function, they would retreat to the rear of their heavy infantry line (where, together with the foot archers and slingers already deployed there, they would continue to rain missiles on the enemy infantry). The heavy cavalry contingents forming the wings were to scatter the enemy cavalry facing them and then (if possible) encircle the main body of the enemy infantry. These tactical moves were not so different from those used by Caesar; the differences mostly regarded the heavy infantry. The Roman legionaries now had a quite passive role during pitched battles: instead of moving against the enemy as they had during the Principate, they preferred to wait the attack of the enemy infantry by keeping their defensive positions and forming a wall of shields.²⁰ Thanks to the new combination of oval shield with longer offensive weapons (*lancea* and *spatha*), the Roman heavy infantrymen tried to use their superior coordination and organization to repulse the enemy attacks with crippling losses. When this happened, the battle was won. If the enemy was able to break the line of Roman heavy infantry, the battle was lost. As is clear from this general description, missile weapons were now much more important than before. During the Principate, the *pila* of the legionaries had the same tactical role that was now performed by specific skirmishing lines of light infantry and cavalry. In addition, the foot archers deployed to the rear of the heavy infantry played an important role during all phases of the battle. This general preference for fighting from a certain distance can be again explained as a result of the main tactical need: reducing human and material losses of the *comitatenses* to a minimum. As the years went by, especially during the very last decades of the Western Empire, light troops became increasingly important. Mounted archers, in particular, started to be much more numerous than cavalrymen equipped with heavy armour. This process was a direct result of the devastating Hunnic invasions into the heart of Roman Europe that were led by Attila.



A perfect example of a Late Roman saddle. (*Photo and copyright by Cohors Prima Gallica*)



Late Roman officer, *Draconarius*, *Vexillifer* and heavy infantrymen.
(Photo and copyright by Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio)



Late Roman officer, *Draconarius*, *Vexillifer* and heavy infantrymen.
(Photo and copyright by Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio)

9. See Esposito, G., *The Late Roman Army* (Point Pleasant, Winged Hussar Publishing, 2016).

10. See Cowan, R., and O'Brogain, S., *Roman Guardsman 62 BC-AD 324* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 2014).

11. See Nicolle, D., *Romano-Byzantine Armies 4th–9th Centuries* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 1992).
12. See Baker, P., *The Armies and Enemies of Imperial Rome* (Worthing, Wargames Research Group, 1981).
13. See Esposito, G., *The Late Roman Army* (Point Pleasant, Winged Hussar Publishing, 2016).
14. See. Baker, P., *The Armies and Enemies of Imperial Rome* (Worthing, Wargames Research Group, 1981).
15. See Simkins, M., and Embleton, R., *The Roman Army from Hadrian to Constantine* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 1979).
16. See Esposito, G., *The Late Roman Army* (Point Pleasant, Winged Hussar Publishing, 2016).
17. See Nicolle, D., *Romano-Byzantine Armies 4th-9th Centuries* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 1992).
18. See Luttwak, E., *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).
19. See Baker, P., *The Armies and Enemies of Imperial Rome* (Worthing, Wargames Research Group, 1981).
20. See: Elliot, P., *Legions in Crisis: Transformation of the Roman Soldier AD 192-284* (Stroud, Fonthill Media, 2014).

Chapter 4

Clothing, Equipment and Weaponry

The general appearance of Roman soldiers during the period AD 284-476 was quite different from that reproduced on the famous Trajan's Column: the traditional image of the legionaries equipped with segmented armour and the auxiliaries with chainmail was no longer in existence by the end of the 'Third Century Crisis'.¹ In general terms, it is not correct to speak of 'uniforms' for the armies of Antiquity, but we can surely say that the Roman Army of the Principate had acquired a high level of standardization in its dress and equipment, mainly due to the fact that state factories produced military clothing, weapons and armour for all the soldiers of the Empire. However, as we have already seen, the 'Third Century Crisis' saw a progressive collapse of the Roman central administration, which had important consequences for the organization of the military forces but also for the supply system that had worked very well until then. During those years of anarchy, the regular soldiers started to receive new clothes and weapons on a much more irregular basis: this resulted in the partial loss of the high level of standardization that had been reached previously. Diocletian and Constantine did what was possible in order to rebuild the supply system of the army. The *Notitia Dignitatum*, for example, lists a total of thirty-five state *fabricae* (factories) located across the Empire and producing materials for the armed forces. This means that the previous system was at least partially restored. Each state factory was under the control of a *Procurator* and was even protected by a small military garrison. The expenses for production of military materials were still paid by the community, thanks to the existence of a specific tax. After the definitive division of the Empire in 395, however, the different levels of uniformity between the military units of the Western and Eastern Empires became apparent. The tax revenues of the eastern regions were almost double those of the western ones, with the result that soldiers from Gaul or Italy started to be equipped with materials of inferior quality. At this point of Roman military history, the two Empires followed their own destinies: in the West, the economic

difficulties increased vastly during the central decades of the fifth century, while in the East, the system of taxation remained strong.



Personal equipment of a Late Roman heavy infantryman. (*Photo and copyright by Septimani Seniores*)



Personal equipment of a Late Roman heavy infantryman. (*Photo and copyright by Septimani Seniores*)



Late Roman soldiers including *Draconarius*, *Vexillifer* and *Tubicen*.
(Photo and copyright by Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio)



Late Roman officers and *Vexillifer*. (Photo and copyright by Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio)



Late Roman heavy infantrymen with *lorica squamata* and *lorica hamata*. (Photo and copyright by Contubernium Primum)

To sum up, we could say that whilst the standard soldier of the Late Empire was not as well uniformed as the one of the Principate, it is sure, however, that a certain level of standardization was still in existence. For example, we can refer to the shield emblems reproduced in the *Notitia Dignitatum*: most of the military units listed in this document have a distinctive emblem, which was painted on their shields. This is one of the most modern examples of uniformity regarding the military equipment of ancient armies. Something similar had already been achieved in the past, for example by the classical hoplites of the Greek city-states, but on a much smaller scale. Generally speaking, the clothing and equipment of the *comitatenses* showed a higher degree of uniformity than those of the *limitanei*: the latter mostly bought their clothing from small local stores attached to their frontier forts. Just like the *auxilia* of the previous centuries, the weapons and equipment of the *limitanei* were strongly influenced by the military fashions of the peoples living along the Roman frontiers (both inside and outside the Empire).

Military clothing

The main garment worn by the Roman soldier was still the tunic: this, however, had changed a lot since the times of Augustus. The Arch of

Septimius Severus in Rome, which was completed at the very beginning of the third century, still shows Roman soldiers with the traditional kind of tunic worn during the Principate, yet the following years of crisis would change this situation. The central decades of the third century saw the widespread introduction of the new long-sleeved tunic. This was adopted from the contemporary dress of Germanic warriors, who already used it on a large scale. The Roman terminology for this garment was *tunica manicata*, and it was generally made of wool during winter and linen during summer. The tunic was held by a specific kind of belt, used only by soldiers and known as a *cingulum militiae*. The *tunica manicata* was basically a simple T-shaped garment, with tight sleeves and usually reaching to the knees. It was not made of cut and sewn parts, but woven entire in a single piece: it was folded in half and sewn up the sides, with a neck slit cut in the centre. It was generally quite decorated, with woven or attached strips and circular roundels of cloth: the first were known as *clavi*, the second were called *orbiculi*. Both these kinds of decorative elements usually comprised geometrical patterns and stylized plant motifs, but could also include human or animal figures. The *clavi* were narrow vertical bands of cloth running from the top to the bottom of the tunic, while the *orbiculi* were patterned roundels located on the shoulders and skirt of the tunic. The standard colours for military tunics were red and white. White was extremely popular in the hottest regions of the East.



Personal equipment of a Late Roman heavy infantryman. (*Photo and copyright by Septimani Seniores*)

After the tunic, the cloak was the second most important garment of the Roman soldier. This item remained more or less the same as that already used during the Principate: hip-length and semi-circular, it was known as a *sagum*. It could be decorated with fringes or with applied decorations of the same kind worn on tunics. Since AD 382, use of the cloak was permitted only for soldiers, so it became the main distinctive garment of the military. The cloaks of officers were quite different from those of soldiers: they were longer (ankle-length) and trapezoid in shape, and were not decorated with *clavi* or *orbiculi* but with large embroidered panels having the form of a square, known as *tabula*. All cloaks were pinned up on the right shoulder by a large brooch, which could be richly decorated if worn by a senior officer. Materials and colours were more or less the same as for tunics: wool for winter and linen for summer, red and white being the most popular colours.



Example of *cingulum militiae*. (Photo and copyright by Septimani Seniores)



Late Roman heavy infantrymen during scouting operations. (*Photo and copyright by Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio*)



Several nice examples of *cingulum militiae*. (Photo and copyright by *Contubernium Primum*)



Late Roman leather front-fastening short boots with integrally cut laces. (Photo and copyright by *Cohors Prima Gallica*)



Late Roman heavy infantrymen marching on a bridge. (Photo and copyright by Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio)

The *cingulum militiae* (military belt) had a very important symbolic significance: wearing it meant being part of the army, exactly like wearing the *sagum* (civilians used different models of belt). Depriving a soldier of his belt meant expelling him from the army. Roman military belts were usually all bossed and used for holding weapons. During the early fourth century they started to show a strong Germanic influence, especially in the decorations. Bronze or iron fittings became increasingly popular, both cast and chiselled, being embellished with punched or carved work. Trousers, known as *bracae*, were still considered by well-educated Romans as a *barbarian* garment at the end of the fourth century, but the legions garrisoning the northern frontiers had already adopted them on a large scale since the early days of the Principate. By the time of Diocletian and Constantine, most of the soldiers wore *bracae*. Regarding footwear, the traditional model of open sandals known as *caligae* had completely disappeared by the end of the third century, being replaced by new front-fastening short boots with integrally cut laces. For headgear,

when not wearing the helmet, soldiers on active service usually had a particular kind of cap known as a *pileus pannonicus* on their heads. This could be made with felt or napped wool; it could be smooth or shaggy, low or tall. The cylindrical shape made this kind of cap very comfortable and easy to produce. Apparently it started to be used during the early third century, also being adopted as a sign of distinction by civilian dignitaries. This pillbox cap was usually covered with fur, especially in the northern regions of the Empire.

Helmets

During the 'Crisis of the Third Century', all the various kinds of helmet traditionally worn by the Roman soldiers were progressively abandoned and substituted with new ones.² This happened mainly for two reasons. Firstly, the previous models of helmet were quite elaborate to produce and thus required particular skills in order to be made. In an age of anarchy, characterized by the collapse of the military supply system, mass production required helmets with simpler designs. The second factor was the influence of the Sarmatians and Sassanids: the Romans learned from their new enemies how to produce cheaper and simpler models of helmet. These new models are commonly divided into two large families, the 'ridge helmets' and the 'spangenhelms'.³

The helmets of the first group are so called because they were characterized by the possession of a bowl made up of two or four parts, united by a longitudinal ridge. This method of construction was copied by the Romans from Sassanid helmets. The earliest confirmed example of a Roman 'ridge helmet' is the so-called 'Richborough helmet', which dates back to 280. Unlike earlier Roman helmets, the skull of the 'ridge helmet' was constructed from more than one element. Roman 'ridge helmets' can be classified into two types of skull construction: bipartite and quadripartite, respectively referred to as 'Intercisa-type' and 'Berkasovo-type'. The bipartite construction was characterized by a two-part bowl united by a central ridge (running from front to back) and by the presence of small cheekpieces. It lacked a base-ring running around the rim of the bowl. Some surviving examples of the bipartite construction have metal crests, such as the helmets known as 'Intercisa-IV' and 'River Maas'. The quadripartite construction was characterised by a four-piece bowl connected by a central ridge, with two plates (connected by a reinforcing band) on each side of the ridge and a base-ring uniting the elements of the skull at the rim of the helmet. This type of helmet was further characterized by large cheekpieces. Some surviving examples of the quadripartite

construction also have a nasal strip. It is believed that the cheekpieces were attached to the skull of the helmet by a liner and that very frequently a separate neck guard was attached to the back of the helmet by using flexible leather straps. The bipartite construction or 'Intercisa-type' has ear-holes, while the quadripartite construction or 'Berkasovo-type' does not. Some scholars, bearing in mind that earlier Roman cavalry helmets usually had cheek guards with a section covering the ears, have suggested that the 'Intercisa-type' was used by infantrymen and the 'Berkasovo-type' by cavalrymen. This interesting hypothesis is supported by an important archaeological find, the so-called 'Deurne helmet': this has an inscription related to a cavalry unit of the *Equites stablesiani*. However, both types of 'ridge helmet' are depicted in several works of art as being worn by both infantrymen and cavalrymen. It is thus highly probable that they were used interchangeably.



Late Roman officer with 'Berkasovo-I' helmet. (*Photo and copyright by Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio*)



Nice example of 'Berkasovo-I' helmet. (*Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme*)



Different models of Late Roman helmet including 'Intercisa-IV', 'Deurne helmet' and 'Berkasovo-I' (from left to right). *(Photo and copyright by Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio)*

The 'spangenhelm' arrived in Western Europe by way of what is now southern Russia and Ukraine, being spread by nomadic Iranian tribes like the Sarmatians, who lived among the Eurasian steppes. However, the term 'spangenhelm' is clearly of Germanic origins: 'spangen' refers to the metal strips that form the framework of the helmet, while 'helm' simply means helmet. The characteristic metal strips of a 'spangenhelm' connect three to six steel or bronze plates; they made up a framework that takes a conical design, which curves with the shape of the head and culminates in a point. The front of the helmet generally included a nasal strip. 'Spangenhelms' could also incorporate chainmail as neck protection, thus forming a sort of aventail on the back. Some surviving examples also include eye protection, having a shape that resembles modern eyeglass frames; others include a full face mask. Older 'spangenhelms' often had cheek flaps made from metal or leather. In general, the 'spangenhelm' was an effective protection for the head that was relatively easy to produce.



Nice example of 'Deurne helmet'. (*Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme*)



Nice example of 'Berkasovo-II' helmet. (*Photo and copyright by Fectio*)



Nice example of 'Berkasovo-II' helmet and *lorica squamata*. (Photo and copyright by Fectio)

Both families of late Roman helmets could include heavy decorations, especially if the helmet belonged to a rich officer. Many surviving examples of helmets from the Late Empire have evidence of decorative silvering or are covered by costly silver-gilt sheathing. The job of decorating helmets was entrusted to special artisans working in the state factories, who were known as *barbaricarii*. Some helmets of senior officers, like the so-called 'Berkasovo-I helmet', are decorated with several glass gems (located on the bowl, the cheekpieces and the neckguard).

Armour

With the *Constitutio Antoniana* of AD, as we have seen, the main social distinction between legionaries and auxiliaries was suddenly cancelled: all inhabitants of the Empire were now Roman citizens and thus there was no more sense in the differences of equipment existing between legionaries and auxiliaries. Until the 'Crisis of the Third Century', legionaries had been equipped with the segmented armour known as *lorica segmentata* while the auxiliaries had the traditional chainmail armour (*lorica hamata*). The latter had been used by the legionaries during most of the Republican period, but had been gradually substituted with the *lorica segmentata* during the age of Augustus. As with the helmets, the 'Third Century Crisis' represented a real turning point for Roman armour: the *lorica segmentata*, quite complex and difficult to produce, was progressively abandoned during the turbulent decades following 235.⁴ The traditional segmented armour is still reproduced on the Arch of Constantine, erected in 315, but we should bear in mind that these depictions are from an earlier monument by Marcus Aurelius and were later incorporated into the Arch of Constantine. The *lorica segmentata* probably disappeared around the middle of the third century, replaced by the *lorica hamata* formerly worn only by the auxiliaries, which now started to be used by all units. The Roman chainmail comprised alternating rows of closed 'washer-like' rings punched from iron sheets and rows of riveted rings made from drawn wire that ran horizontally, which produced very flexible, reliable and strong armour. Each ring had an inside diameter of about 5mm and an outside diameter of about 7mm. Up to 30,000 rings would have gone into one *lorica hamata* and the estimated production time was two months, even with continual slave labour at the state factories. Although labour-intensive to manufacture, this kind of armour, with good maintenance, could be used for several decades by a soldier. Constant friction kept the rings of the *lorica hamata* free of rust, unlike the *lorica segmentata*, which needed constant maintenance to prevent corrosion. Generally, the *lorica hamata* covered the legs to the knees; sleeves could be long or short.

The *lorica hamata*, however, was not the only kind of armour worn by the soldiers of the Late Empire. There were three other kinds of armour, which had very different origins and features. The first of these was that commonly known as *lorica squamata* (scale armour), made from small metal scales sewn to a fabric backing. The individual scales (*squamae*) could be of iron or bronze; the metal was generally not very thick, 0.5-0.8mm being a common range. Since the scales overlapped in every direction, however, the multiple layers gave good

protection. Scales could have rounded, pointed or flat bottoms with the corners clipped off at an angle. They could be flat, or slightly domed, or have a raised midrib/edge. The scales were wired or laced together in horizontal rows that were then laced or sewn to the backing. Therefore, each scale had from four to twelve holes: two or more at each side for wiring to the next scale in the row, one or two at the top for fastening to the backing and sometimes one or two at the bottom to secure the scales to the backing or to each other. Sometimes the *squamae* could be tinned. Scale armour had been used in Asia since the days of the Sumerians, so it is no surprise that the *lorica squamata* was extremely popular in the Eastern Empire. Mail armour was dominant in the Western Empire (it had been invented by the Celts, who exported it to all the western area of the Mediterranean). The *lorica squamata* had already been used by Eastern auxiliaries well before the third century, as confirmed by the Syrian archers reproduced on Trajan's Column. During the 'Crisis of the Third Century', however, scale armour started to be used also by legionary units on a large scale.



Modern reconstruction of *lorica squamata*. (Photo and copyright by Jyrki



Examples of Late Roman greaves. (*Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme*)

The second kind of armour used by the Late Roman Army was the lamellar one, but this was employed on a much smaller scale than those discussed above because it was only imported into Europe from the steppes of Eurasia during the very last decades of the Empire. In addition, it was mostly employed by mercenary *buccellarii* or by *foederati*, and not by regular Roman soldiers. It was, however, massively imported into Europe by the Huns. Lamellar armour consisted of small platelets, commonly known as *lamellae*, which were punched and laced together in order to be assembled in several horizontal rows. *Lamellae* could be made of metal, leather or horn; metal ones could be lacquered in order to resist corrosion or as decoration. Unlike scale armour, lamellar armour was not attached to a cloth or leather backing.

The final kind of armour was the model of cuirass commonly known as ‘muscle cuirass’. This was a type of body armour cast to fit the wearer’s torso and designed to mimic an idealised human body. These cuirasses were cast in two pieces, the front and back, which were later hammered together. During the Late Empire, simpler versions of ‘muscle cuirass’ were usually preferred, having the sculpted anatomy reduced to an abstract design. The cuirasses of senior officers were often highly ornamented with sculpted mythological scenes or similar kinds of rich decoration. The ‘muscle cuirass’ was usually used in combination with fringed stripes of leather known as ‘*pteruges*’, which were worn at the armholes and at the lower edge of the cuirass. The ‘muscle cuirass’ was mostly worn by officers, being considered a sign of their rank; apparently soldiers did not use it very much. The Columns of Arcadius and Theodosius, as well as other examples from Late Roman art, suggest that the ‘muscle cuirass’ was of common use among the *Scholae Palatinae* and *Protectores* units. Since the days of the Praetorians, the ‘muscle cuirass’ had been the favourite kind of personal protection worn by all Roman guard units; apparently, this general trend continued during the Late Empire.

Generally speaking, both light infantry and light cavalry did not wear armour. The heavy cavalry used the same kinds of armour described above and the ultra-heavy cavalry of the cataphracts employed peculiar defensive combinations that mixed various kinds of protection (segmented, mail, scale and lamellar armour).

Shield

During the course of the third century, the traditional *scutum* used by the legionaries disappeared, along with the *lorica segmentata*. Being

convex and rectangular, this shield was made from three sheets of wood glued together and covered with canvas and leather. The mass production of the *scutum* was quite complex, considering the various phases that were needed to create a shield of good quality. As with other items of standard Roman military equipment, the production of the rectangular shield proved to be unsustainable for the creative structures and supply system of the Empire during the chaotic years of the 'Third Century Crisis'. As a result, by the time of Constantine, almost all Roman military units had adopted a new and simpler model of oval shield.⁵ This was also carried by light infantry and cavalry, although with some possible variations in dimensions (the shields of light infantry and cavalry were generally a bit smaller than the heavy infantry ones, having a more circular shape). Unlike the former *scutum*, the new oval shield was not convex but could be either dished (bowl-shaped) or flat. This difference in shape obviously had some consequences on tactics, but it seems that the new model of shield was also sometimes used to form the defensive *testudo*. The oval/round shield was much larger than the previous *scutum* and was constructed in a different way, being made of solid planks instead of plywood, and supported by a double grip (at the elbow and hand, while the old shield had just a single central grip). The general features of the oval/round shield made it much easier to produce than the rectangular model. In many respects, it was the direct heir of the oval shield used by the *auxilia* throughout their history.

Until the military reforms of Augustus, all Roman soldiers had used an oval shield, but from the first decades of the Empire, legionaries started to receive rectangular shields, while auxiliaries continued to use oval ones. With the changes of the third century, the *lorica hamata* and oval shields of the *auxilia* started to be used by the whole Roman Army. The new oval shield was about 110cm high and 90cm wide, constructed of 1cm thick wood planks, covered and bound with leather. A hollow iron or bronze boss covered the central hand grip. The *scutum* was usually painted with standard decorations, which were almost identical for each legion; the shields of the auxiliaries were also generally painted with standard motifs. The shields' uniform decoration meant it was not possible to distinguish one unit from another. After the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine, however, the new oval/round shield started to be painted with different motifs for each unit. Every military unit of the Roman Army was given its distinctive shield emblem. This was quite revolutionary, reflecting a very precise unit organization. Fortunately, it is possible to reconstruct the shield emblems of the Late Roman Army because of the

exceptional primary source of the *Notitia Dignitatum*: we have therefore decided to reproduce all the shield emblems and the orders of battle contained in this document in the Appendix of this book. We should note, however, that the shield emblems of some categories of troops have not survived in the *Notitia Dignitatum*: all the emblems of the cavalry units from the Eastern Empire, for example, have been lost. In addition, it is important to note that all the units of *limitanei* listed in this ancient document have no corresponding shield emblem: some scholars think that all these were lost, but it is more reasonable to suppose that the frontier troops had no distinctive unit emblems. Only the *comitatenses*, the mobile units, had distinctive emblems painted on their shields. They could operate in different regions of the Empire and thus needed to be identified by commanders of the field armies. The *limitanei*, meanwhile, served only in their home territories and were not employed in other areas of the Empire, so they had no need to be identified through their shield emblems. The various unit emblems reproduced in the *Notitia Dignitatum* are quite complex. However, it is clear that the motifs effectively painted on their shields by individual soldiers were notably simplified and stylized if compared with those in the *Notitia Dignitatum*. Usually, each soldier might have managed to paint just a quick and simple copy of his unit's emblem. The variety of symbols and colours which appear in the shield emblems of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, mixed in various combinations, is simply astonishing. It is thus hard to believe that each soldier of each unit respected such a complex system of emblems.



The typical defensive formation commonly known as the shield wall.
(Photo and copyright by Cohors Prima Gallica)



The typical defensive formation commonly known as the *testudo*.
(Photo and copyright by Fernando Crespo)

Hand weapons

As we have just seen, the Roman legionaries of the Principate could count on excellent defensive equipment made up of the *lorica segmentata* and *scutum*. Yet the real strength of the Roman heavy infantrymen consisted of their offensive weapons: the *pilum* (heavy javelin), *gladius* (short sword) and *pugio* (dagger). The first weapon to be used in a battle was the *pilum*, a javelin specifically designed to kill enemies from long distance or to limit them in the use of their shields (the *pilum* was extremely difficult to remove after hitting the external part of a shield or a cuirass). Once the enemy ranks had been shattered by the initial rain of javelins, the legionaries drew their short swords and charged their opponents. According to the Roman tactical doctrine, emphasis was on using the *scutum* to provide maximum body coverage, while the *gladius* was used to attack with

devastating thrusts and short cuts. Thanks to such tactics, the Romans were able to defeat any enemy infantry for centuries. This kind of warfare also limited the number of casualties suffered by the Imperial troops, as using their swords to thrust in the few spaces created between the shields of their close formations, the legionaries were rarely exposed to the offensive weapons of their enemies, who had very few chances to manoeuvre.⁶ Like the *gladius*, the *pugio* dagger was a short stabbing weapon. It was used as a secondary arm during the most intense hand-to-hand fighting, especially when space for movements became very limited or when the *gladius* could not be used for any reason.



Modern reconstructions of *spatha*. (Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme)



Modern reconstructions of Late Roman knives. (Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme)

Soon after the beginning of the 'Third Century Crisis', the traditional Roman system of offensive weapons started to be completely modified. The short stabbing-sword *gladius* was gradually phased out by the new *spatha*, a long sword that had originally been used only by cavalymen. At the same time, the *pugio* dagger was progressively abandoned as a secondary hand weapon, being replaced by simpler short and single-edged knives (which were not regularly carried by all soldiers, as the *pugio* had been). The adoption of the *spatha* by the Roman Army can be considered as one of the many important military changes happening during the third century. Roman tactics were slowly changing as a result of the new military threats faced by the Empire. The new prominence of cavalry had transformed the Roman Army into a highly mobile force mostly composed of heavy armoured cavalymen and mounted archers. As a result of the new cavalry's predominance on the fields of battle, the close infantry formations for hand-to-hand fighting were progressively

abandoned and the long slashing swords of the cavalry also started to be used by the infantry. The cavalry's long sword had been copied by the Romans from the Celts; similarly, the *gladius* had been copied from the Iberian warriors of Hannibal who fought against Rome during the Punic Wars. The *spatha* was introduced into the Roman Army by the auxiliary cavalry units formed with Celtic recruits from Gaul. Generally speaking, the units of *auxilia* retained their own weapons and fighting traditions after joining the Roman Army. The Celtic cavalrymen, famous for their excellent long swords, continued to use these superior weapons. As a result, from the early days of the Principate, the Celtic *spatha* started to be used by the majority of Roman cavalry units. It was a straight and long sword, with a standard blade length between 75cm and 1 metre (much more than a *gladius*). After being used for several decades only by the cavalry, the *spatha* also started to be used by heavy infantry soldiers during the third century. The *gladius* was initially relegated to use as a light infantry weapon, but was soon totally abandoned. The *spatha* thus started to be produced in two different versions, one for infantry and one for cavalry: the first had a long point, while the second had a rounded tip that prevented accidental stabbing of the cavalryman's foot.

Missile weapons and spears

Since the days of the Republic, the Roman legionary's fighting style was defined by two weapons: the *pilum* and the *gladius*. The first, a javelin with a long iron shank for punching through enemy shields and armour, was usually thrown at close range. It gave the Roman legionaries a great tactical advantage over their enemies, because it was a very effective light infantry weapon in the hands of heavily armoured infantrymen. No other soldier in the Mediterranean world had such excellent defensive equipment used together with a deadly missile weapon like the *pilum*. The traditional heavy *pilum* was progressively abandoned from around 250 during the 'Crisis of the Third Century'. Unlike other pieces of traditional Roman military equipment, it was not substituted by a single new weapon: the Roman infantrymen of the Late Empire could use two different kinds of javelin to break up the ranks of the enemy, each having precise distinctive features.⁷ Both these new missile weapons, known as *spiculum* (heavy javelin) and *verutum* (light javelin), had butt-spikes that protected the base of the shaft from rot and could be used also for thrusting.

The *spiculum* replaced the *pilum* as the heavy infantryman's main throwing weapon around 250. Scholars suppose that it could have

resulted from the gradual combination of the *pilum* with the standard Germanic javelin, known as the *angon*. It is interesting to note that the *pilum*, like many other Roman weapons, had been copied by them from another military tradition (that of the Etruscans). With the birth of the *spiculum*, this Italic technology mixed with Germanic elements. The *angon* of Germanic warriors was quite similar to (and probably derived from) the *pilum*, having a barbed head and a long narrow socket or shank, made of iron mounted on a wooden haft. The barbs were designed to lodge in an opponent's shield so that it could not be removed. The long iron shank prevented the head from being cut from the shaft. The *angon* was likely similarly designed for the purpose of disabling enemy shields, thus leaving combatants vulnerable and disrupting enemy formations. The shaft may have been decorated, and iron or bronze rings were sometimes fitted onto it, which may have marked the centre of balance and thus the best place to hold the weapon. The Roman *spiculum* had all the main features of the Germanic *angon*: the main difference between the *spiculum* and the *pilum* was the length of the thin point, as the new javelin tended to have a much shorter point than the previous one. The *spiculum* was significantly shorter than its ancestor, perhaps being 190cm long. Its exact design is not fully known, as there were many variants, but it did have a medium iron shank attached to the head.

In addition to the *spiculum*, the soldiers of the Late Empire could also employ a lighter and longer-ranged javelin known as the *verutum*. This was the main missile weapon of the light infantry and cavalry, but could also be used by heavy infantrymen in combination with the *spiculum*. The *verutum* had been used for skirmishing purposes since the days of the Republic, being issued to the light infantrymen of the legions. During the 'Crisis of the Third Century', however, it started to be employed by all kinds of units. The shaft of the *verutum* was about 1.1 metres long, being much shorter than that of the old *pilum*. The point measured about 13cm; and each *verutum* had either an iron shank like the *spiculum* or a tapering metal head. In general, the *verutum* had a narrow armour-piercing head similar to that of the heavy javelins, though obviously with inferior penetration capabilities. Over time, it seems that the *spiculum* started to be used on a lesser scale, apparently also being replaced by the *verutum* as the main javelin for the heavy infantry.

In addition to the above, the soldiers of the Late Empire could also use some very innovative missile weapons known as *plumbatae* or *martio-barbuli*. These were lead-weighted darts, usually carried by the heavy infantrymen on the back of their oval shields and thrown by

hand. Initially introduced in Diocletian's newly created elite *legiones palatinae* of the *Ioviani* and *Herculiani*, these efficient darts rapidly spread to the other legions and *auxilia palatina* units. These darts were a sort of short arrow with a weight attached to the shaft. The term *plumbatae* etymologically contains the word *plumbum*, which meant 'lead' in Latin: as a result, we could translate the term *plumbatae* as 'lead-weighted darts'. The term *martiobarbuli* is most likely an assimilation of *martio* and *barbuli*; it could thus be translated as 'little barbs of Mars'. This second etymology clearly implies a barbed head. An important archaeological find from Wroxeter in Shropshire has finally confirmed the general idea that we have of *plumbatae*: fletched darts with an iron head, weighted with lead. They had little penetrating power and a very short range (30 metres), but their barbed heads made them eminently suitable for crippling an enemy without armour, or a horse.⁸ Each heavy infantryman carried six of them clipped to the back of his shield.

During the Principate, the Roman Army had always included a good number of light infantrymen equipped as slingers. As stated previously, these were initially mercenaries and later auxiliaries from the Balearic Islands (which had an ancient military tradition that was strongly linked to the use of the sling as a skirmishing weapon). Over time, however, slings started to be used by soldiers from every corner of the Empire, and the original model of sling traditionally employed in the Balearic Islands was joined by a new one. The slingers of the Late Empire were mostly equipped with the so-called 'staff sling', which consisted of a staff (a length of wood) with a short sling at one end. One cord of the sling was firmly attached to the staff, while the other end had a loop that could slide off and release the projectile. Staff slings were extremely powerful, because the staff could be made as long as 2 metres, creating a dynamic lever. Ancient art shows slingers holding staff slings by one end with the pocket behind them, using both hands to throw the staves forward over their heads. The staff sling could throw heavy projectiles at much greater distance and at a higher arc than a traditional Balearic 'hand sling', and could be as accurate in the hands of an experienced skirmisher. The *Notitia Dignitatum* lists a unit of *funditores*, who were probably an elite corps of slingers (on the model of the artillery *ballistarii*).

The kind of crossbow employed by the Late Roman Army, commonly known as *manuballista* or *cheiroballista*, was an evolution of the old stone-throwing *ballista*, being a small and portable arrow-firer that could be used by a single man. Despite retaining the mechanism of the *ballista* with smaller dimensions, it was actually a crossbow.

This hand-held weapon had a very advanced technology for the time and was probably developed during the second half of the third century. Apparently it was not distributed to soldiers of regular infantry units, but only the special artillery corps of *ballistarii*. Vegetius, writing in the fifth century, also mentions another model of portable crossbow employed by the Late Roman Army: the *arcuballista*. This probably started to be produced and used during the very last decades of the Western Empire. Unlike the earlier *manuballista*, it was quite easy to produce because it had the same basic mechanism of the standard medieval crossbow and not the complex workings of the *ballista*. In contrast to the heavier *manuballista*, the *arcuballista* was light enough to also be used by mounted soldiers (as an alternative to the composite bow).

Since the reforms of Gaius Marius, the Roman heavy infantry had abandoned the spear as one of its main offensive weapons, with all legionaries starting to be equipped with the *pilum*. The infantry of the auxiliary units did not receive the *pilum* and continued to employ the model of spear known as the *lancea*.⁹ When the legionaries started to abandon the *pilum* around 250, replacing it with the new *spiculum* heavy javelin, a good number of them started to adopt the *lancea* of the auxiliaries. As a result, after several centuries, the Roman heavy infantry was again equipped with spears on a large scale. The *lancea* of the Late Empire differed from that employed during the Principate by the auxiliaries in that it was light enough to be thrown just prior to contact or could be retained for use in hand-to-hand combat. Apparently, judging from the primary sources that we have, the heavy infantrymen of the Late Empire preferred using the *lancea* for close fighting, but each soldier usually also carried two or three *spicula* that were to be used as throwing weapons. Very often, however, a legionary from the Late Empire could be armed only with a *lancea*, whilst the soldiers of the *auxilia palatina*, being elite light infantrymen, were mostly equipped with the *spiculum* or *verutum* (the latter being the standard weapon of all light infantrymen and light cavalrymen). The wood shaft of the *lancea* could be painted in various colours to prevent rot, but this was not always possible under campaign conditions.

Roman cavalry had also continued to employ spears during the Principate. During the 'Crisis of the Third Century', however, the Roman heavy cavalry abandoned the traditional model of *lancea* and replaced it with a new one known as the *contus*. This was a type of long wooden lance originally used by the Iranian heavy cavalry, most notably by cataphracts. Since the first century AD, this heavy cavalry

weapon had started to be employed on a massive scale by the Sarmatians. It was soon adopted by the Parthian cataphracts, who employed it against the Romans of Crassus at Carrhae. The *contus* was about 4 metres long and had to be wielded with two hands while directing the horse using the knees, which made it a specialist weapon that required a lot of training and good horsemanship to use. Initially, only highly trained cavalrymen such as those fielded by the Sassanids could use such a weapon in an effective way. The *contus* was reputedly a weapon of great power, especially if compared to other cavalry spears of its time. The great length of this lance was probably the origin of its name, since the Greek word *kontus* meant ‘oar’ or ‘barge-pole’. The Roman cavalry introduced the *contus* on a large scale after facing the Sarmatian heavy cavalry in battle. The light cavalry, instead, continued to be armed for all the period taken into account with normal javelins of the *verutum* model.



Modern reconstructions of *spiculum* and *verutum* (details of the point).
(Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme)



Modern reconstruction of *plumbata*. (Photo and copyright by Cohors Prima Gallica)

Another piece of equipment copied by the Romans from the Sarmatians was the so-called *draco*, a military standard introduced into the Roman cavalry by Sarmatian auxiliaries during the second half of the second century AD. Apparently, it was soon a great success and was later adopted by infantry units too. In the infantry, it

substituted the traditional *vexillum* as the standard of the cohort; as a result, the *Vexillifer* of each cohort was replaced by a *Draconarius*. The eagle, however, remained the primary symbol of legions. The *draco* was a traditional element of Dacian military equipment, but had later been adopted by the Sarmatians, who passed its use to the Romans. As is clear from its name, it had the form of a dragon, with open wolf-like jaws containing several metal tongues. The hollow head of the dragon was in metal and was mounted on a pole, and it had a long fabric tube affixed at the rear. When used, the *draco* was held up into the wind, where it filled with air and made a shrill sound as the wind passed through its metal tongues.



Modern reconstruction of *draco*. (Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme)

Bow

As we have seen, archers had remained a secondary element of the Roman Army during the Principate. The bow was not an important weapon in the Roman military tradition, and thus all the units of archers employed by the Empire were formed by provincial auxiliaries. With the cavalry reforms of the third century, however, the Romans started to equip part of their cavalymen as mounted archers on the model of the Sarmatian and Sassanid horsemen.¹⁰ As a result, the Roman light cavalry adopted the composite bow of the Eurasian steppes as its main weapon. At the same time, however, large numbers of light infantry units also started to be defined as *sagittarii* and were equipped with bows of the traditional wooden model

employed in continental Europe.

The composite bow was made from horn, wood and sinew laminated together. The horn was on the belly of the bow facing the archer, while sinew was on the outer side of the wooden core. The wooden core gave the bow its shape and dimensional stability. When the bow was drawn, the sinew (stretched on the outside) and horn (compressed on the inside) stored more energy than the wood for the same length of bow. The construction of a composite bow was a very complex process: it required more varieties of material than a wooden bow and much more time. It was often made of multiple pieces, joined with animal glue in V-splices. Pieced construction allowed the use of woods with different mechanical properties for the bending and non-bending sections: the wood of the bending part of the limb had to endure intense shearing stress. A thin layer of horn, glued onto what would be the belly of the bow, could store more energy than wood in compression. Goat and sheep horn was commonly used for this purpose. The sinew, soaked in animal glue, was then laid in layers on the back of the bow, and the strands of sinew were oriented along the length of the bow. The sinew was normally obtained from the lower legs and back of wild deer or domestic ungulates (hoofed animals). Sinew would extend further than wood, again allowing more energy storage. Hide glue was used to attach layers of sinew to the back of the bow and to attach the horn belly to the wooden core. The animal glue could lose strength in humid conditions and be quickly ruined by submersion or rain: for these reasons, composite bows were always stored in protective leather cases.



Late Roman archer with composite bow. (*Photo and copyright by Septimani Seniores*)



Late Roman archer with small round shield and composite bow. (*Photo and copyright by Fectio*)



Modern reconstruction of Late Roman composite bow. (Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme)

The wooden bow of the infantry, the *arcubus ligneis*, was constructed according to the longbow tradition of continental Europe from a single piece of wood. Crafting a composite bow may take a week's work, plus a drying time of some months, but a wooden bow could be made in a day and dried in a week. Historically, peoples living in humid or rainy regions have favoured wooden bows, while those in dry or arid regions have preferred composite ones. The main advantage of composite bows over longbows was their combination of smaller size with high power. In addition, almost all composite bows are recurve ones, as the shape curves away from the archer, a design that gives higher draw-weight in the early stages of the archer's draw, thus storing more total energy. The method used by cavalry to carry arrows for the composite bow showed a clear nomadic influence, because they were held pointing upwards in a barrel quiver (hanging from the waistbelt). Infantry quivers, by contrast, were round-bottomed cylinders hanging from a shoulder-strap (which hold the arrows point downwards). In either case, a single archer normally carried thirty to forty arrows at a time.

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1. See Bishop, M.C., and Coulston, J.C., *Roman Military Equipment From the Punic Wars to the Fall of Rome* (Oxford, Oxbow Books, 2006).
 2. See Travis, J., and Travis, H., *Roman Helmets* (Stroud, Amberley, 2015).
 3. See Esposito, G., *The Late Roman Army* (Point Pleasant, Winged Hussar Publishing, 2016).
 4. See Travis, J., and Travis, H., *Roman Body Armour* (Stroud, Amberley, 2012).
 5. See Travis, J., and Travis, H., *Roman Shields* (Stroud, Amberley, 2014).
 6. See Bishop, M.C., and Coulston, J.C., *Roman Military Equipment From the Punic Wars to the Fall of Rome* (Oxford, Oxbow Books, 2006).

7. See Esposito, G., *The Late Roman Army* (Point Pleasant, Winged Hussar Publishing, 2016).
8. See MacDowall, S., *Late Roman Infantryman AD 236--65* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 1994).
9. See Simkins, M., and Embleton, R., *The Roman Army from Hadrian to Constantine* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 1979).
10. See Brzezinski, R., Mielczarek, M., and Embleton, G., *The Sarmatians 600 BC-AD 450* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 2002).

Appendix I

The Roman Army of the *Notitia Dignitatum*

The *Notitia Dignitatum* is without doubt the most important primary source that can be used to reconstruct the structure and organization of the Roman Army around the beginning of the fifth century AD. During this crucial period, which followed the final division of the Roman Empire into two parts, the military forces of the West and the East acquired a new internal organization that would remain basically unchanged until the fall of the Western Roman Empire. In this Appendix, we report the Orders of Battle of both armies, reconstructed after the *Notitia Dignitatum*. In addition, we reproduce all the shield emblems included in this precious source. From the *Notitia*, we know that each military unit of the Late Empire had its own distinctive emblem; unfortunately, not all of the shield devices reproduced in the *Notitia Dignitatum* have survived, so not all the units of our Orders of Battle will have their emblem. We should remember that the section of the *Notitia Dignitatum* devoted to the Eastern Roman Empire was written some years before than that dedicated to the Western Empire: as a result, the following Orders of Battle do not date back to the same years. The section on the Eastern Empire was composed around 395, while that for the Western Empire dates back to 410.

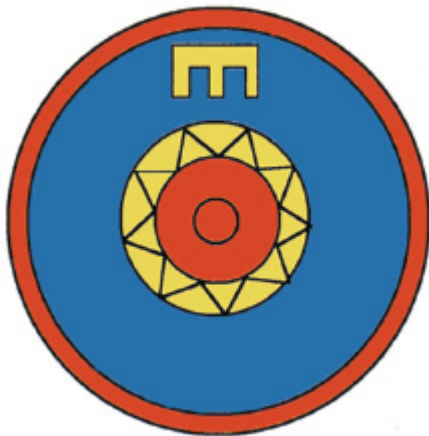
Eastern Roman Army

Magister officiorum (commander of the *Scholae Palatinae*)

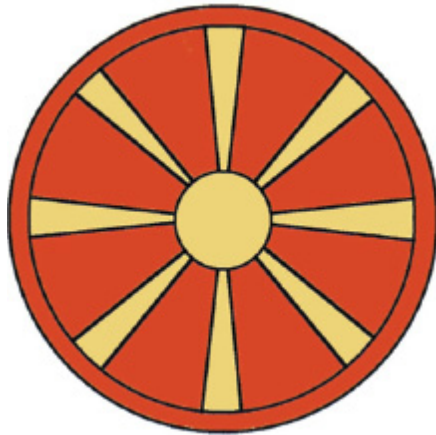
Schola scutariorum prima



Schola armaturarum seniorum



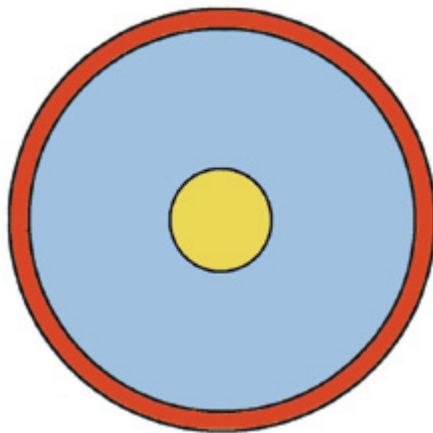
Schola gentilium seniorum



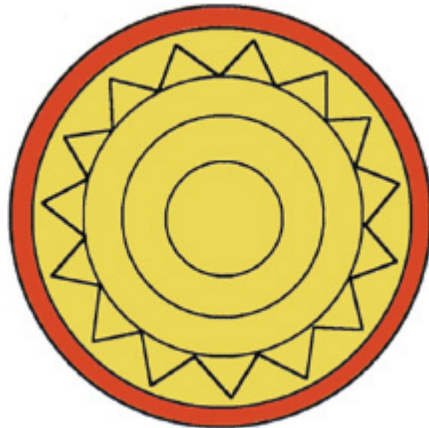
Schola scutariorum secunda



Schola armaturarum iuniorum



Schola gentilium iuniorum

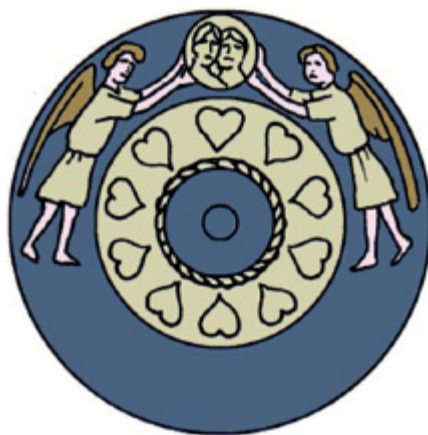


Schola scutariorum clibanariorum

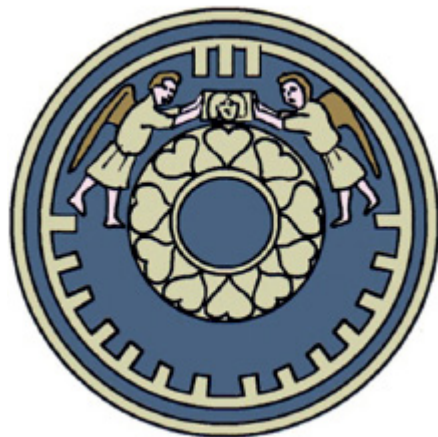
Schola scutariorum sagittariorum

Comes domesticorum equitum et Comes domesticorum peditum

Domestici equites



Domestici pedites



Comes Isauriae (under direct command of the Emperor)

Legio II Isaura

Legio III Isaura

Magister militum praesentalis I (commander of the 1st central Imperial Army)

Legiones palatinae

Auxilia palatina

Lanciarri seniores

Fortenses

Balavi seniores



Ioviani iuniores

Nervii

Brachii iuniores



Herculiani iuniores



Matiarii iuniores



Salii



Constantiani



Iertii sagittarii Valentis



Iliberi



Mattiarii seniores



Defensores



Visi



Sagittarii seniores Gallicani



Ractobarii



Felices Honoriani iuniores



Sagittarii iuniores Gallicani



Anglevarii



Vidiores



Primi Theodosiani



Ientii Theodosiani



Felices Theodosiani Isauri



~~Vexillationes palatenses~~

~~Equites palatarii Bithynienses~~

~~Equites Arcenses seniores Gallicani~~

~~Equites clibanarii~~

~~Equites sagittarii~~

~~Equites praefectarii~~

~~Equites promoti iuniores~~

~~Equites primi clibanarii Parthi~~

Magister militum praesentalis II (commander of the 2nd central Imperial Army)

Legiones palatinae

Matiani seniores



Scythae



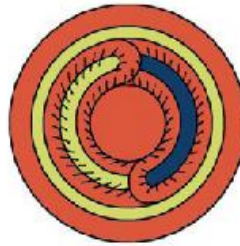
Undecimani



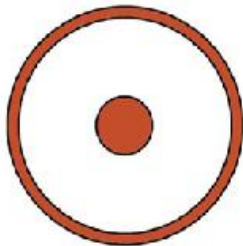
Daci



Primani



Landarii iuniores

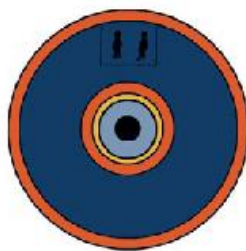


Auxilia palatina

Regii



Mattiaci iuniores



Vindices



Cornuti



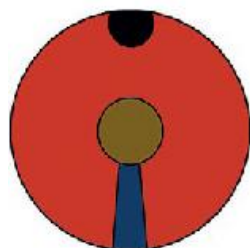
Sagittarii seniores Orientales



Bucinobantes



Iubantes



Sagittarii iuniores Orientales



Falchovarii



Constantiniani



Sagittarii domitii



Thaures



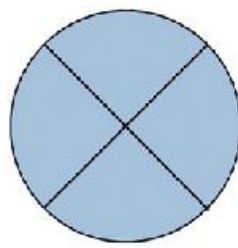
Iervingi



Felices /Arcadiani iuniores



Quarti Theodosiani



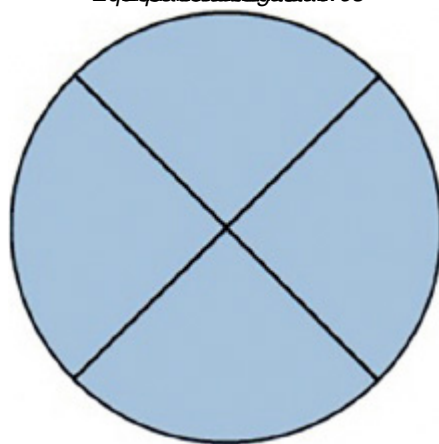
Felices Theodosiani



Secundi Theodosiani



Verbaliones palatiales
Equites palatiales
Equites singulares



Magister militum per Orientem

Auxilia palatina

Legiones comitatenses

Felices Arcadiani seniores

V Macedonia

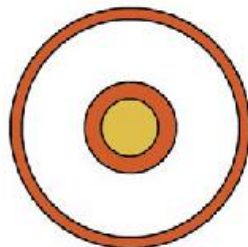
I Flavia Constantiana



Felices Honoriani seniores

Martenses seniores

II Flavia Constantia Thebaeorum



VII Gemina

II Felix Valentis Thebaeorum



Ballistarii seniores

X Gemina

I Flavia Theodosiana



Vexillabene comitatenses

Cuneus equitum secundorum clibanariorum Palmirenorum

Equites armigeri seniores orientales

Equites tertio Dalmatae

Equites primi scutarii Orientales

Equites secundi stabliesiani

Equites tertii stabliesiani



Pseudocomitatenses

II Armeniaci



I Italica



Usana sagittaria



Fortenses auxilarii



IV Italica



Ballistarii Theodosiaci



Funditores



VI Parthica



Transigitani



Legio IV Scythica

Legio XVI Flavia Firma

Cohors I Gotthorum

Cohors I Ulpia Dacorum

Cohors III Valeria

Cohors I victorum

Ala I nova Herculia

Ala I luthungorum

Equites scutarii Illyriciani

Equites promoti Illyriciani

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Matthana)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Anatha)

Equites promoti indigenae (at Adada)

Equites promoti indigenae (at Rosafa)

Equites sagittarii (at Acadama)

Equites sagittarii (at Acavatha)

Equites Dalmatae Illyriciani

Equites Mauri Illyriciani

Dux Mesopotamiae

Legio I Parthica Nisibena

Legio II Parthica

Cohors L Arabum

Cohors XIV Valeria Zabdenorum

Ala II nova Aegyptiorum

Ala VIII Flavia Francorum

Ala XV Flavia Carduenorum

Equites scutarii Illyriciani

Equites promoti Illyriciani

Equites ducatores Illyriciani

Equites felices Honoriani Illyriciani

Equites sagittarii indigenae Arabanenses

Equites scutarii indigenae Pafenses

Equites sagittarii indigenae Thibithenses

Equites sagittarii indigenae

Equites promoti indigenae (at Apadna)

Equites promoti indigenae (at Constantina)

Dux Foenicis

Legio I Illyricorum

Legio III Gallica

Cohors III Herculia

Cohors V pacta Alamannorum

Cohors I Iulia lectorum

Cohors II Aegyptiorum

Cohors I Orientalis

Ala I Damascena

Ala nova Diocletiana

Ala I Francorum

Ala I Alamannorum

Ala I Saxonum

Ala I Foenicum

Ala II Salutis

Equites Mauri Illyriciani

Equites scutarii Illyriciani

Equites promoti indigenae (at Saltaha)

Equites promoti indigenae (at Avatha)

Equites promoti indigenae (at Nazala)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Abina)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Casama)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Calamona)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Adatha)

Equites Dalmati Illyriciani

Equites Saraceni indigenae

Equites Saraceni

Dux Palaestinae

Legio X Fretensis

Cohors XII Valeria

Cohors X Carthaginensis

Cohors I agentenaria

Cohors IV Frygium

Cohors II Gratiana

Cohors I equitata

Cohors II Galatarum

Cohors I Flavia

Cohors IV Palaestinorum

Cohors II Cretensis

Cohors I salutaria

Ala I miliaria Sebastena

Ala Antana dromedariorum

Ala Constantiana

Ala II felix Valentiana

Ala I miliaria

Ala Idiota constituta

Equites Dalmatae Illyriciani

Equites promoti Illyriciani

Equites scutarii Illyriciani

Equites Mauri Illyriciani

Equites Thamudeni Illyriciani

Equites promoti indigenae (at Sabiaea)

Equites promoti indigenae (at Zodocathae)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Hauanae)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Zoarae)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Moahile)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Robatha)

Equites primi felices Palaestini

Dux Arabiae

Legio III Cyrenaica

Legio IV Martia

Cohors I miliaria Thracum

Cohors I Thracorum

Cohors VIII voluntaria

Cohors III felix Arabum

Cohors III Alpinorum

Ala IX miliaria

Ala VI Hispanorum

Ala II Constantiana

Ala II Miliarensis

Ala I Valentiana

Ala II felix Valentiniana

Equites scutarii Illyriciani

Equites promoti Illyriciani

Equites Dalmati Illyriciani

Equites Mauri Illyriciani

Equites promoti indigenae (at Speluncis)

Equites promoti indigenae (at Mefa)

Equites sagittari indigenae (at Gadda)

Equites sagittari indigenae (at Diafenis)

Dux Osrhoenae

Legio IV Parthica

Cohors I Gaetulorum

Cohors I Eufratensis

Ala VII Valeria praelectorum

Ala I Victoriae

Ala II Paflagonum

Ala I Parthorum

Ala I nova Diocletiana

Ala I salutaria

Equites Dalmatae Illyriciani

Equites promoti Illyriciani

Equites Mauri Illyriciani

Equites promoti indigenae (at Banasam)

Equites promoti indigenae (at Sina Iudaeorum)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Oraba)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Thillazamana)

Equites sagittarii indigenae Medianenses

Equites sagittarii indigenae primi Osrhoeni

Dux Armeniae

Legio XV Apollinaris

Legio XII Fulminata

Legio I Pontica

Cohors III Ulpia miliaria Petraeorum

Cohors IV Raetorum

Cohors militaria Bosporiana

Cohors miliaria Germanorum

Cohors I Theodosiana

Cohors Apuleia civium Romanorum

Cohors I Lepidiana

Cohors I Claudia equitata

Cohors II Valentiana

Cohors Mochora

Ala Rizena

Ala Theodosiana

Ala felix Theodosiana

Ala I Augusta Colonorum

Ala Auriana

Ala I Ulpia Dacorum

Ala II Gallorum

Ala castello Tablariensi

Ala I pretorica

Ala I Iovia felix

Ala I felix Theodosiana

Equites sagittarii (at Sabbu)

Equites sagittarii (at Domana)

Comes limitis Aegypti

Legio V Macedonica

Legio XIII Gemina

Legio III Diocletiana Thebaidos

Legio II Traiana

Cohors III Galatarum

Cohors II Astarum

Cohors I sagittariorum

Cohors I Augusta Pannoniorum

Cohors I Epireorum

Cohors IV Iuthungorum

Cohors II Ituraeorum

Cohors II Thracum

Cohors IV Numidarum

Ala Theodosiana nuper constituta

Ala Arcadiana nuper constituta

Ala II Armeniorum

Ala III Arabum

Ala VIII Vandilorum

Ala VII Sarmatarum

Ala I Aegyptiorum

Ala veterana Gallorum

Ala I Herculia

Ala V Raetorum

Ala I Tingitana

Ala Apriana

Ala II Assyriorum

Ala V Praelectorum

Ala II Ulpia Afrorum

Ala II Aegyptiorum

Equites stablesiani

Equites Saraceni Thamudeni

Dux Thebaidos

Legio III Diocletiana

Legio II Flavia Constantia Thebaeorum

Legio II Traiana

Legio I Valentiniana

Legio I Maximiana

Legio II Valentiniana

Cohors I Lusitanorum

Cohors scutata civium Romanorum

Cohors I Apamenorum

Cohors XI Chamavorum

Cohors IX Tzanorum

Cohors IX Alamannorum

Cohors I felix Theodosiana

Cohors V Suentium

Cohors VI saginarum

Cohors VII Francorum

Ala I Abasgorum

Ala II Hispanorum

Ala Germanorum

Ala IV Britonum

Ala I Hiberorum

Ala Neptunia

Ala III dromedariorum

Ala VIII Palmyrenorum

Ala VII Herculia voluntaria

Ala I Francorum

Ala I Iovia catafractariorum

Ala VIII

Ala II Herculia dromedariorum

Ala I Abasgorum

Ala I Quadorum

Ala I Valeria dromedariorum

Cuneus equitum Maurorum scutariorum

Cuneus equitum scutariorum

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Tentira)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Copto)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Diospoli)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Lato)

Equites sagittarii indigenae (at Maximianopoli)

Equites promoti indigenae

Equites felices Honoriani

Milites Miliarenses

Magister militum per Thracias

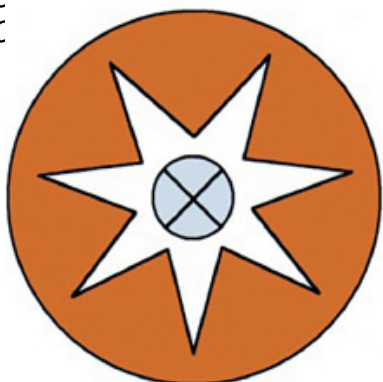
Vexillarius palatinus

E Solenses seniores

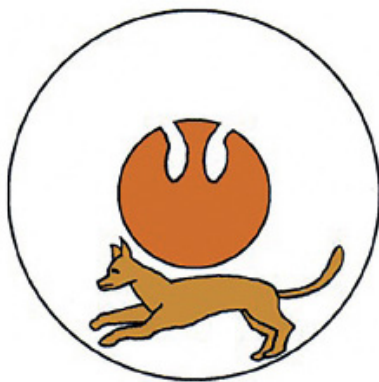
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C

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Menapii



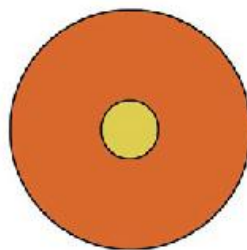
I Maximiana Thebaeorum



I Flavia gemina



Lancarii Stobenses



III Diocletiana Thebaeorum



II Flavia gemina



Constantini Dafnenses



Iertiodecimani



Constantini seniores



Ballistarii Dafnenses



Quartodecimani



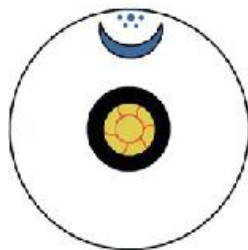
Diviteses Gallicani



Ballistarii iuniores



Pannoniciani iuniores



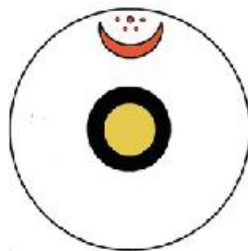
Iulia Alexandria



Valentinianenses



Tzanni



Augustenses



Gratianenses



Solenses Gallicani



Vexillationes comitatenses

Equites catafractarii Albigenses

Liquites sagittarii seniores

Equites sagittarii iuniores

Liquites primi theodosiani

Dux Moesiae II

Legio I Italica

Legio XI Claudia

Cohors IV Gallorum

Cohors I Aureliana

Cohors III Valeria Bacarum

Cuneus equitum scutariorum (at Securisca)

Cuneus equitum scutariorum (at Latus)

Cuneus equitum scutariorum (at Appiara)

Cuneus equitum Solensium

Cuneus equitum armigerorum

Cuneus equitum secundorum armigerorum

Cuneus equitum stablesianorum

Milites praeventores

Milites Constantini

Milites Dacisci

Milites tertii navclarii

Milites Novenses

Milites primi Moesiaci

Milites Moesiaci

Milites quarti Constantiani

Milites Cimbriani

Milites navclarii Altinenses

Praefectus navium amnicarum et militum ibidem deputatorum

Dux Scythiae

Legio II Herculia

Legio I Iovia

Cuneus equitum scutariorum

Cuneus equitum Solensium

Cuneus equitum stablesianorum (at Cii)

Cuneus equitum stablesianorum (at Bireo)

Cuneus equitum catafractariorum

Cuneus equitum armigerorum

Cuneus equitum Arcadum

Milites navclarii

Milites superventores

Milites Scythici (at Carso)

Milites Scythici (at Dirigothia)

Milites secundi Constantini

Milites primi Constantini

Milites quinti Constantini

Milites primi Gratianenses

Magister militum per Illyricum

Legiones palatinae



Britones seniores

Asarii seniores

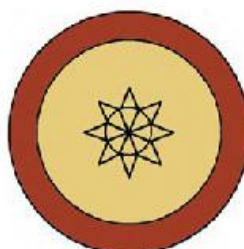


Auxilia palatina

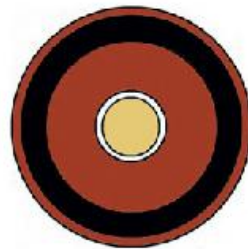
Sagittarii lecti



Asarii iuniores



Invicti iuniores



Petulantes iuniores



Atecotti

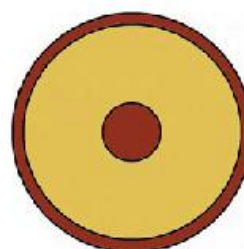


Legiones cornilenses

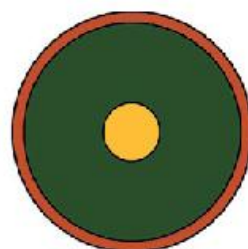
Motarii constantes



Germaniciani seniores



Minervii



Marii*Secundani**Lancarii iuniores**Dianenses**Lancarii Augustenses*

Vexillationes comitatenses Pseudocomitatenses
~~Equites sagittarii seniores~~ Timacenses auxiliarii
~~Equites Theodosiani seniores~~ Theodosiani iuniores
 Ballistarii Theodosiani iuniores Bugaracenses
 Scampenses Scupenses
 Ulpianenses

Dux Moesiae I

Legio IV Flavia

Legio VII Claudia

Milites exploratores (at Novis)

Milites exploratores (at Taliatae)

Milites exploratores (at Zmirnae)

Milites Vincentiensium

Cuneus equitum Constantiacorum

Cuneus equitum promotorum (at Flaviana)

Cuneus equitum promotorum (at Viminacio)

Cuneus equitum sagittariorum (at Tricornio)

Cuneus equitum sagittariorum (at Laedenatae)

Cuneus equitum Dalmatarum (at Aureomonto)

Cuneus equitum Dalmatarum (at Pinco)

Cuneus equitum Dalmatarum (at Cuppis)

Auxiliares Reginenses

Auxiliares Tricornienses

Auxiliares Novenses

Auxilium Margense

Auxilium Cuppense

Auxilium Gratianense

Auxilium Taliatense

Auxilium Aureomontanum

Classis Histricae

Classis Stradensis et Germensis

Dux Daciae ripensis

Legio V Macedonica

Legio XIII Gemina

Cohors secundorum reducum

Cohors nova sostica

Milites exploratores

Cuneus equitum Dalmatarum Fortensium

Cuneus equitum Dalmatarum Divitensium (at Dortico)

Cuneus equitum Dalmatarum Divitensium (at Drobeta)

Cuneus equitum scutariorum (at Cebro)

Cuneus equitum scutariorum (at Aegetae)

Cuneus equitum Dalmatarum (at Augustae)

Cuneus equitum Dalmatarum (at Varina)

Cuneus equitum stablesianorum

Cuneus equitum Constantinianorum

Auxilium Miliarentium

Auxilium primorum Daciscorum

Auxilium Crispitienses

Auxilium Mariensium

Auxilium Claustrinorum

Auxilium secundorum Dacischorum

Classis Histricae

Classis Ratianensis

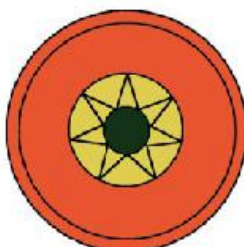
Western Roman Army

Magister officiorum (commander of the *Scholae Palatinae*)

Schola scutariorum prima



Schola armaturarum seniorum



Schola gentilium iuniorum



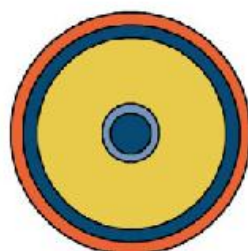
Schola scutariorum secunda



Schola armaturarum iuniorum



Schola scutariorum iuniorum



Schola scutariorum tertia



Schola gentilium seniorum



Comes domesticorum equitum et comes domesticorum peditum

Domestici equites



Domestici pedites



Magister utriusque militiae (commander of the *Comes Italiae*)

Legiones palatinae

Auxilia palatina

Ioviani seniores

Pannonici seniores

Comuli seniores



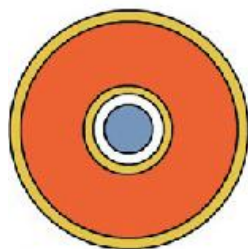
Herculiani seniores

Moesiaci seniores

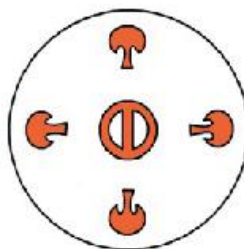
Brachiaci seniores



Divitenses seniores



Octavarii



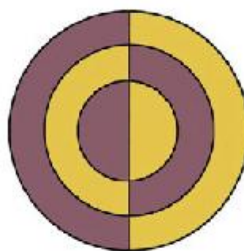
Potulantes seniores



Tongreani seniores



Thebei



Coltae seniores



Ileruli seniores



*Victores seniores
Comuti iuniores*



Felices iuniores



Botovi seniores



Leones iuniores



Honoriani Atecotti iuniores



Mattiaci seniores



Lxculatores seniores

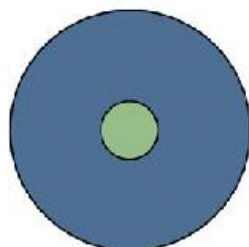
Grati



Urisigavi iuniores



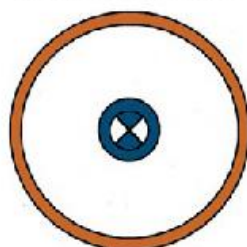
Iovii seniores



Sabini



Honoriani Mauri iuniores



Legiones cornilenses

Galli victores



Mattiani iuniores



Regii



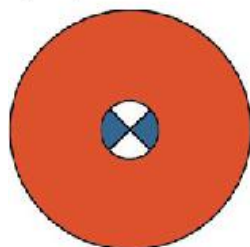
Septimani iuniores



Germaniciani iuniores

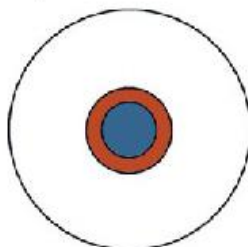


Equites promoti seniores



Vexillationes palatinae

Equites Cornuti seniores



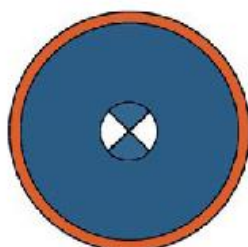
Comites Alani



Equites brachiati seniores



*Equites constantes
Valentinianenses iuniores
Comites seniores*



Vexillationes comitatenses

Equites Mauri feroces

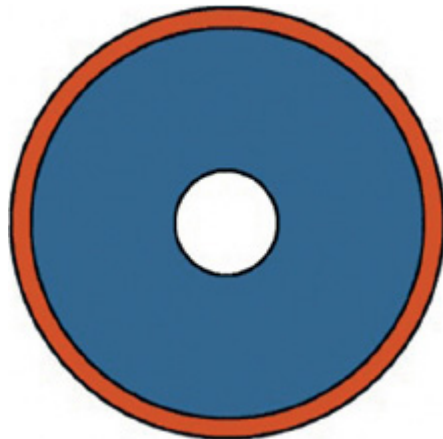


Pseudocomitatenses

I Alpina



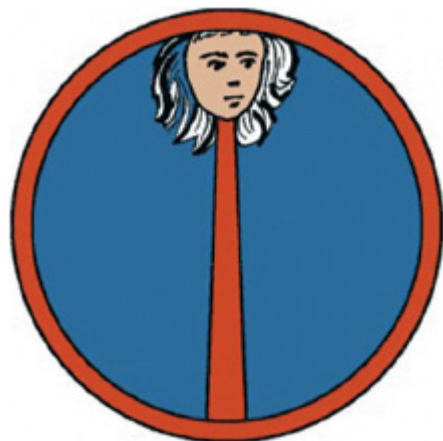
III Iulia Alpina



Pontinenses



Gratianenses iuniores



Limitanei

Milites iuniores Italici

Sarmati gentiles Apuliae et Calabriae

Sarmati gentiles per Brittios et Lucaniam

Sarmati gentiles (at Foro Fulviensi)

Sarmati gentiles (at Opittergii)

Sarmati gentiles (at Patavio)

Sarmati gentiles (at Cremonae)

Sarmati gentiles (at Taurinis)

Sarmati gentiles (at Aquis)

Sarmati gentiles (at Novariae)

Sarmati gentiles (at Vercellis)

Sarmati gentiles (in Regionis Samnitis)

Sarmati gentiles (at Boniniae)

Sarmati gentiles (at Qudratis and Eporizio)

Sarmati gentiles (at Liguria Pollentia)

Sarmati gentiles (location missing)

Classis Venetum

Classis Ravennatium

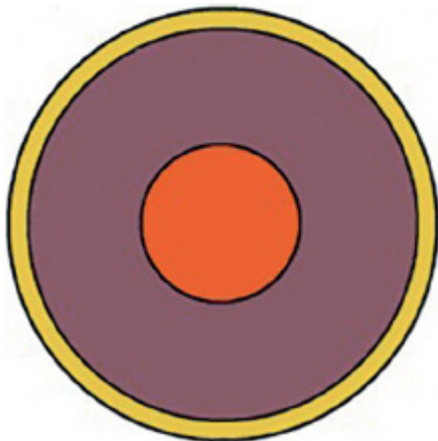
Classis Comensis

Classis Misenatium

Magister equitum praesentalis (commander of the Comes Galliae)

Legiones palatinae

Lanciarri Sabarienses



Auxilia palatina



Ampsivarii

Sagittarii Nervi Gallicani



Leones seniores



Brachiati iuniores



Salii seniores

Valentianenses iuniores



Iovii iuniores Gallicani



Gratianenses seniores



Balavi iuniores



Mattiaci iuniores Gallicani



Bructeri

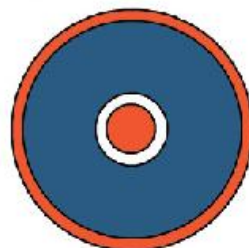


Britones

Honoriani Atecotti seniores



Atecotti iuniores Gallicani



Honoriani ascarii seniores

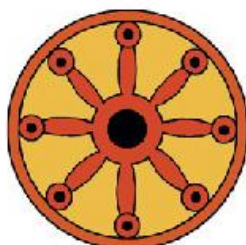


Legiones comitalenses

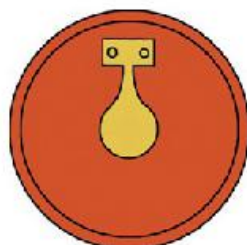
Armigerii defensores seniores



II Britannica



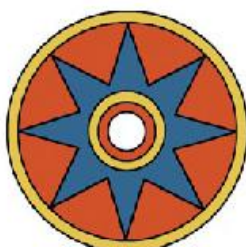
Geminiacenses



Lanciarii Gallicani Honoriani



Ursarienses



Cortoriacenses



Menapii seniores



Præsichantes

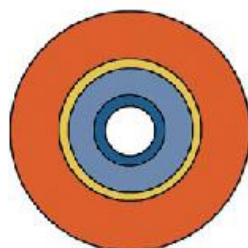


Honoriani felices Gallicani

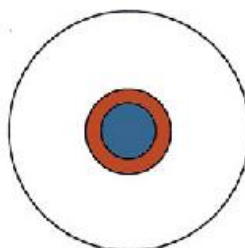


Vexillationes palatinae

Equites Batavi seniores



Equites Cornuti seniores



Equites Batavi iuniores



Equites Brachii iuniores

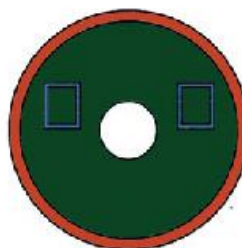
Vexillationes comitatenses

Equites armigeri seniores



Equites Dalmatae

Passerentienses



Equites Mauri aliles



Equites octavo Dalmatae



Equites primi Gallicani



Equites Constantiaci feroces

Pseudocomitatenses

I Flavia Gallicana Constantia



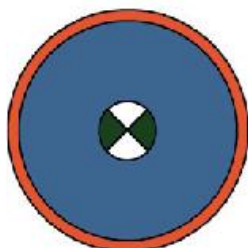
Mauri Osismiaci



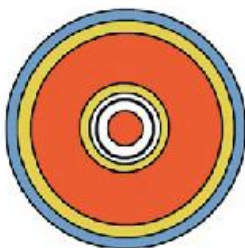
Corniacenses



Martenses



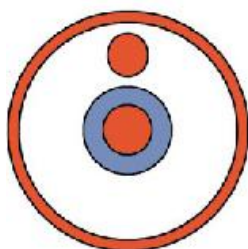
I Flavia Metis



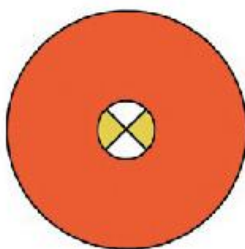
Septimani



Abrincateni



Superventores iuniores



Cursarienses iuniores

Musmagenses

Romanenses



Defensores seniores



Ballistarii

Defensores iuniores

Garronenses

Anderetiani

Acinenses

Insidiatores

Truncensimani

Abulci

Exploratores

Limitanei

Cohors I Flavia Sapaudica

Cohors Noevempopulana

Milites muscularii

Sarmati et Taifali gentiles (in Pictavi)

Sarmati gentiles (in Chora Parisios)

Sarmati gentiles (in Belgica secunda)

Sarmati gentiles (in Rodunensem and Alaunorum)

Sarmati gentiles (at Lingonas)

Sarmati gentiles (location missing)

Laeti gentiles (at Remo and Silvamectum)

Laeti gentiles Suevi (at Ceromannos)

Laeti gentiles Suevi (at Arumbernos)

Laeti Batavi et gentiles Suevi

Laeti Batavi Nemetacenses

Laeti Batavi Contraginnenses

Laeti Teutoniciani

Laeti Franci

Laeti Lingonenses

Laeti Acti

Laeti Nervii

Laeti Lagenses

Classis fluminis Rhodani

Classis barcariorum

Classis Araricae

Classis Anderetianorum

Dux Sequanicae

Milites Latavienses

Dux tractus Armorici et Nervicani

Cohors I nova Armoricana

Milites Carronenses

Milites Mauri Benetori

Milites Mauri Osimaci

Milites Superventores

Milites Martenses

Milites I Flavia

Milites Ursarienses

Milites Dalmatii

Milites Grannonenses

Dux Belgicae secundae

Milites Nervii

Equites Dalmatae

Sarmati gentiles

Laeti gentiles

Laeti Nervii

Laeti Batavi Nemetacenses

Laeti Batavi Contraginnenses

Classis Sambricae

Dux Mogontiacensis

Milites Pacenses

Milites Menapi

Milites Anderetiani

Milites Vindici

Milites Martenses

Milites II Flavia

Milites armigeri

Milites Bingenses

Milites ballistarii

Milites defensores

Milites Acincenses

Comes Britanniae

Auxilia palatina

Victores iuniores Britannici

Legiones comitatenses

Primani iuniores

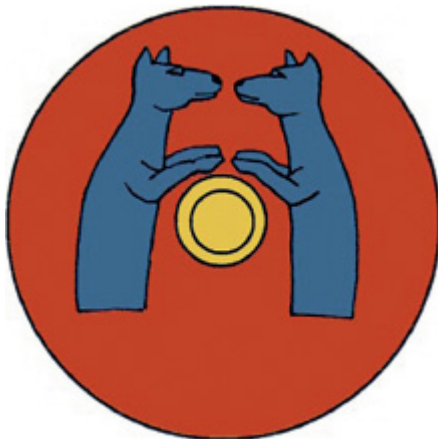
Secundani iuniores

Vexillationes comitatenses

Equites catafractarii iuniores

Equites scutarii Aureliaci

Equites Honoriani seniores



Equites stablesiani

Equites Syri

Equites Honoriani Taifali iuniores



Dux Britanniarum

Legio VI Victrix

Numerus Barcarii

Tigrisienses

Numerus Nervii Dictenses

Numerus Vigilius

Numerus Exploratores
Numerus Directorum
Numerus Defensorum
Numerus Solenses
Numerus Pacenses
Numerus Longovicani
Numerus Supervenientium
Petueriensium
Numerus Maurorum
Aureliani
Cohors IV Lingonensis
Cohors I Cornoviana
Cohors I Frixavorum
Cohors I Batavorum
Cohors I Tungrorum
Cohors IV Gallorum
Cohors I Asturum
Cohors II Dalmatarum
Cohors I Aelia Dacorum
Cohors II Lingonensis
Cohors I Hispanorum
Cohors II Thracum
Cohors I Aelia Classica
Cohors I Morinorum
Cohors III Nerviorum
Cohors VI Nerviorum
Ala I Asturum
Ala Sabiniana
Ala II Asturum
Ala Petriana
Ala I Herculeia
Cuneus Sarmatarum
Equites Dalmatarum
Equites Crispianorum
Equites Catafractarii

Comes litoris Saxonici per Britannias

Legio II Augusta

Numerus Fortensium

Numerus Turnacensium

Numerus Abulcorum

Numerus Exploratorum

Cohors I Baetasiorum

Milites Tungrecanorum

Equites Dalmatarum

Branodunensium

Equites Stablesianorum

Gariannonensium

Comes Illyrici

Auxilia palatina

Sagittarii Tungri

Iovii iuniores



Sequani



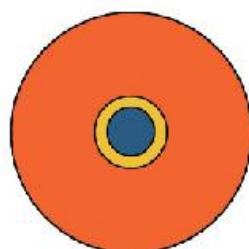
Reti



Honoriani victores



Mattiarii Honoriani Gallicani



Sagittarii venatores



Seguntenses



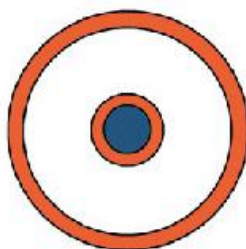
*Calanienses
Valentinianenses*



Latini



Tungri



Legiones comitatenses

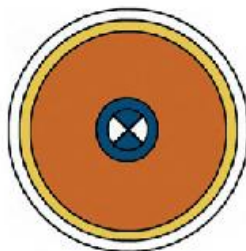
Tertiani



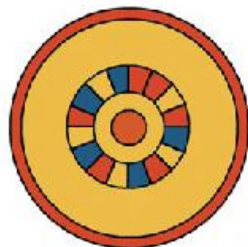
Felices Valentinianenses



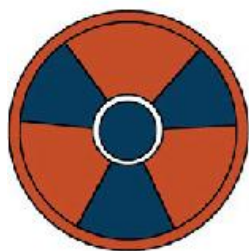
Mauri I Honoriani seniores



III Ilerculca



Pacalianenses



Mauri celtici



Propugnatores iuniores



Pseudocomitatenses

Lanciarri Lauriacenses



Lanciarri Comagenenses



II Iulia Alpina



Dux Raetiae I et II

Legio III Italica

Numerus barbariciorum

Cohors nova Batavorum

Cohors III Brittonum

Cohors VI Valeria Raetorum

Cohors I Herculea Raetorum

Cohors V Valeria Frygum

Cohors III Herculea Pannoniorum

Cohors Herculea Pannoniorum

Milites Ursarienses

Ala I Flavia Raetorum

Ala II Valeria singularis

Ala II Valeria Sequanorum

Equites stablesiani seniores

Equites stablesiani iuniores (at Ponte Aoni)

Equites stablesiani iuniores (at Submuntorio)

Gentes per Raetias deputatae

Dux Pannoniae I et Norici ripensis

Legio X Gemina

Legio XIV Gemina

Legio II Italica

Legio I Noricorum

Cohors (no name given, at Arrianis)

Cohors (no name given, at Caratensis)

Cohors (no name given, at Boiodoro)

Cohors (no name given, at Austuris)

Cohors (no name given, at Cannabiaca)

Cuneus equitum Dalmatarum

Cuneus equitum stablesianorum

Equites promoti (at Arrabonae)

Equites promoti (at Flexo)

Equites promoti (at Mauros)

Equites promoti (at Comagenis)

Equites sagittarii (at Quadriburgio)

Equites sagittarii (at Gerolate)

Equites sagittarii (at Lentiae)

Equites sagittarii (at Lacufelis)

Equites Dalmatae (at Ala Nova)

Equites Dalmatae (at Aequinoctioiae)

Equites Dalmatae (at Ad Herculem)

Equites Dalmatae (at Arlape)

Equites Dalmatae (at Augustianis)

Equites Mauri

Gentes Marcomannorum

Classis Histricae

Classis Arlapensis et Maginensis

Classis Lauriacensis

Dux Pannoniae II

Legio VI Herculea

Legio V Iovia

Cohors III Alpina Dardanorum

Cohors III Alpina

Cohors I Iovia

Cohors I Thraci Cives Romanorum

Milites Calicarienses

Auxilia Herculensia

Auxilia Novensia

Auxilia Augustensia

Auxilia Praesidentia

Auxilia Ascarii

Ala Sirmienses

Cuneus Equitum Scutariorum

Cuneus Equitum Dalmatarum

Cuneus Equitum Constantianorum

Cuneus Equitum Promotorum

Cuneus Equitum Constantium

Cuneus Equitum Italicianorum

Equites Dalmatae (at Novas)

Equites Dalmatae (at Albano)

Equites Dalmatae (at Cornaco)

Equites Dalmatae (at Ricti)

Equites Dalmatae (at Burgentas)

Equites Dalmatae (at Bornoriae)

Equites Dalmatae (at Cusi)

Equites promoti (at Teutibarcio)

Equites promoti (at Tauruno)

Equites sagittarii (at Cuccis)

Equites sagittarii (at Acimirci)

Classis I Flavia Augusta

Classis II Flavia

Classis Histrica

Classis I Pannonica

Classis II Pannonica

Dux Valeriae ripensis

Legio I Adiutrix

Legio II Adiutrix

Cohors (no name given, at Vincentiae)

Cohors (no name given, at Quadriborgio)

Cohors (no name given, at Iovia)

Cohors (no name given, at Borgum Centenarium)

Cohors (no name given, at Alescae)

Cohors (no name given, at Marinanae)

Auxilia Herculentia

Auxilia Ursarentia

Auxilia vigilum

Auxilia Fortensia

Auxilia insidiatorum

Cuneus equitum scutatorum

Cuneus equitum Dalmatarum

Cuneus equitum Constantianorum

Cuneus equitum stablesianorum

Cuneus equitum Fortensium

Equites Dalmatae (at Odiabo)

Equites Dalmatae (at Ad Herculem)

Equites Dalmatae (at Cirpi)

Equites Dalmatae (at Constantiae)

Equites Dalmatae (at Campona)

Equites Dalmatae (at Vetusalinae)

Equites Dalmatae (at Adnamantia)

Equites Dalmatae (at Lussonio)

Equites Dalmatae (at Ripa Alta)

Equites Dalmatae (at Ad Statuas)

Equites Dalmatae (at Florentiae)

Equites promoti (at Crumero)

Equites promoti (at Matrice)

Equites sagittarii (at Intercisa)

Equites sagittarii (at Altino)

Equites Mauri

Equites Flavianenses

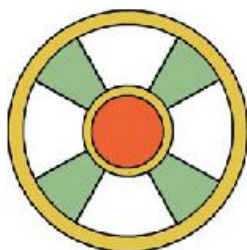
Classis Histricae

Comes Africae

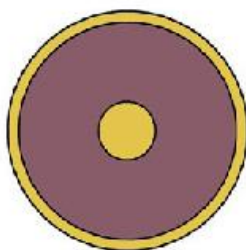
Legiones palatinae

Legiones comitatenses

*Armigeri propugnatores
seniores*



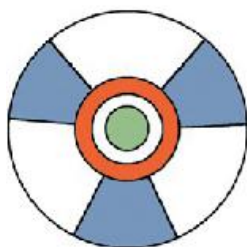
Cimbriani



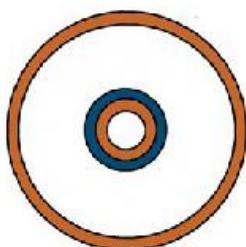
Secundani Italiani



*Armigeri propugnatores
iuniores*



*Auxilia palatina
Cellae iuniores*



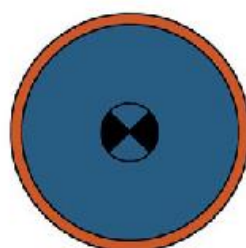
Primani



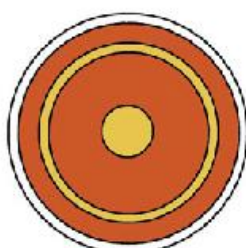
Secundani



Constantiniani



Iertio Augustani



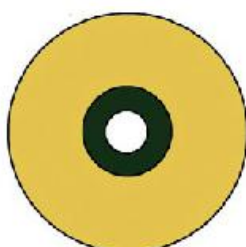
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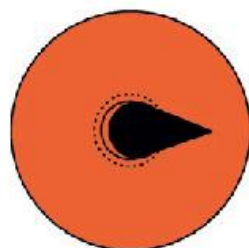


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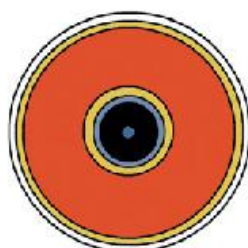


Vexillationes comitatenses

Equites stablesiani italiciani



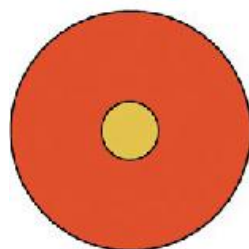
Equites stablesiani seniores



Equites armigeni seniores



Liquites scutarii seniores



Liquites Marcomanni



Liquites clibanarii



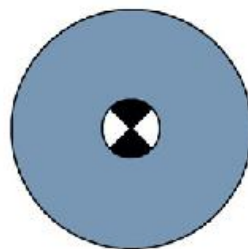
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seniores*



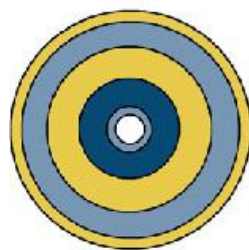
Equites tertio sagittarii



Liquites promoti iuniores



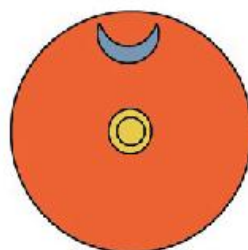
Liquites cetrati seniores



Equites quarto sagittarii



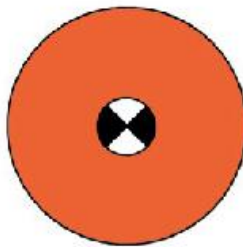
*Equites scutarii iuniores
comitatenses*



Equites sagittarii primi



*Lquitos Parthi sagittarii
iuniores*



Equites Honoriani iuniores



Equites secundo sagittarii



Lquitos crinati iuniores



Equites armigerii iuniores



Limitanei

Limitanei Thamallensis

Limitanei Montensis

Limitanei Bazensis

Limitanei Gemellensis

Limitanei Tubuniensis

Limitanei Zabensis

Limitanei Tubusubditani

Limitanei Thamallomensis

Limitanei Balaretensis

Limitanei Columnatensis

Limitanei Tablatensis

Limitanei Caputcellensis

Limitanei Secundaeforum

Limitanei Taugensis

Limitanei Bidensis

Limitanei Badensis

Dux Tripolitaniae

Milites Fortenses in castris

Leptitanis Milites

Munifices in castris Madensibus

Limitanei Talalatensis

Limitanei Tenthettani

Limitanei Bizerentane

Limitanei Tillibarensis

Limitanei Madensis

Limitanei Maccomadensis

Limitanei Tintiberitani

Limitanei Bubensis

Limitanei Mamucensis

Limitanei Balensis

Limitanei Varensis

Limitanei Sarcitani

Dux Mauretaniae Caesariensis

Limitanei Columnatensis

Limitanei Vidensis

Limitanei inferioris

Limitanei Fortensis

Limitanei Muticitani

Limitanei Audiensis

Limitanei Caput cellensis

Limitanei Augustensis

Comes Tingitaniae

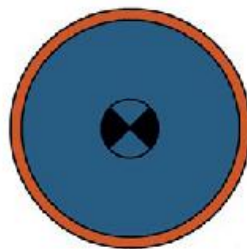
Auxilia palatina

Legiones comitatenses

Mauri tonantes seniores

Mauri tonantes iuniores

Constantiniani



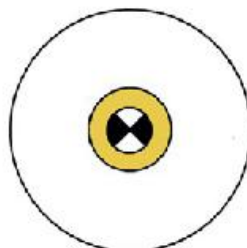
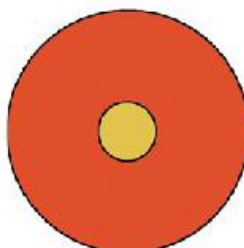
Vexillationes comitatenses

*Equites sagillarii seniores
comitatenses*

*Equites scutarii seniores
comitatenses*

*Equites Cardueni
comitatenses*

Septimani iuniores



Limitanei

Cohors II Hispanorum

Cohors I Herculeae

Cohors I Ilyracorum

Cohors Pacatiensis

Cohors III Hastorum

Cohors Frigilensis

Cohors (no name given, at Sala)

Ala Herculeae

Comes Hispaniae

Auxilia palatina

Ascarii seniores



Ascarii iuniores



Sagittarii nervi



Excubatores iuniores

Tubantes



Felices seniores



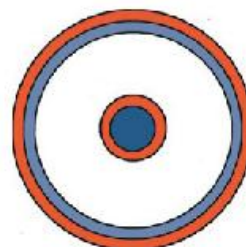
Invicti seniores



Invicti iuniores Britones



Salli iuniores Gallicani



Victores iuniores

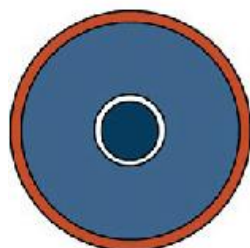


Britsigavi seniores



Legiones comitalenses

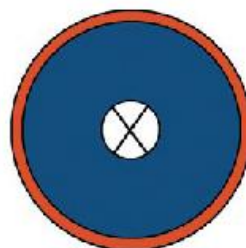
Fortenses



Septimani seniores



Undecimani



Propugnatores seniores



Vesontes



Limilanei

*Legio VII Gemina
Cohors II Flavia Pacatiana
Cohors II Gallica
Cohors Iurensis
Cohors Celtiberac
Cohors I Gallica*

Appendix II

Equipments and weapons of the Late Roman Army

Late Roman senior military officer, fourth century AD



This splendid modern reconstruction shows the exact appearance of a high-ranking officer from the Late Roman Army, with full equipment. Judging from the high quality of his dress and personal equipment, this senior officer could be the commander of a legion or of an *auxilia palatina* unit. The helmet is a magnificent

example of 'Berkasovo-I'; this is richly decorated with several glass gems on the bowl, on the cheekpieces and on the neckguard. Please note the white crest over the helmet, which was worn only by high-ranking commanders. The 'Berkasovo-type' was the version of 'ridge helmet' having quadripartite construction, as clear from this photo. The armour is a classic *lorica squamata*, completed by *pteruges* in white leather with red external edging. The cloak (*sagum*) is of the peculiar model used by officers: ankle-length and trapezoid in shape. On the back it is decorated with the large embroidered panels known as *tabula*. The white *tunica manicata*, instead, is embellished with *clavi* and *orbiculi*. The long *spatha*, only partially visible, is of excellent manufacture. Please note the classic *cingulum militiae* (military belt), showing a clear Germanic influence and having a round bronze fitting. The footwear consists of leather front-fastening short boots with integrally cut laces. The general appearance of the *magistri militum* was probably not very different from that of this figure. *Photo and copyright by Fectio.*

Late Roman junior military officer, fourth century AD



This magnificent modern reconstruction shows the detailed equipment of a junior officer from the Late Roman Army, including shield. The emblem painted on the latter identifies our man as an officer from the *Falchovarii*, an *auxilia palatina* unit listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* as part of the *Comitatus Praesentalis II* of the Eastern Empire. The name of this unit, of clear Germanic origin, has been interpreted as a tribal moniker (albeit an obscure one); apparently this unit was formed, like all the *auxilia palatina*, by recruiting tribal Germanic warriors (in this case from what is now Veluwe, in the modern Netherlands). The helmet is a magnificent example of 'Berkasovo-II', while the armour is a classic *lorica squamata*: this was made from small metal scales sewn to a fabric backing. The individual scales (*squamae*) could be of iron or bronze (as in this case); the metal was generally not very thick, 0.5-0.8mm being a common range. Please note also the large military belts worn over the cuirass, showing a round metal fitting on the front. Both the *spatha* and the round shield are perfect examples of the standard weapons carried by the Late Roman Army. The *sagum* has embroidered *tabula* and is pinned up on the right shoulder by a large brooch. The *tunica manicata* clearly shows some *clavi* (decorative strips of cloth). *Bracae* and short boots were extremely popular because of their comfort, especially during winter. The defensive equipment is completed by leather *pteruges* (in this case in blue) and by a pair of bronze greaves (showing rich and complex decorations). *Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme.*

Late Roman *Draconarius*, fourth century AD



The *Draconarius* became the substitute of the *Vexillifer* when the *draco* standard replaced the traditional *vexillum* as insignia of each cohort. Since the standard had a great symbolic importance, each *Draconarius* was generally very well equipped. In this case, except for some small details, he is practically indistinguishable from an officer. The *draco* was a traditional element of the Dacian military equipment, but it had later been adopted by the Sarmatians who passed its use to the Romans. The headgear is a very comfortable *pileus pannonicus* made of felt, smooth and not particularly tall. The armour is a great example of ‘muscle cuirass’, a type of body

armour cast to fit the wearer's torso and designed to mimic an idealised human body. These cuirasses were cast in two pieces, the front and back, which were later hammered together. During the Late Empire, simpler versions of 'muscle cuirass' were usually preferred, having the sculpted anatomy reduced to an abstract design (as in this case). The cuirasses of senior officers were often highly ornamented with sculpted mythological scenes or with similar kinds of rich decorations (like those of our figure's bronze greaves). The 'muscle cuirass' is used in combination with the classical fringed strips of leather known as *pteruges* (worn at the armholes and at the lower edge of the cuirass). The *sagum* is quite simple, while the *tunica manicata* has decorative *clavi* and *orbiculi*. *Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme.*

Late Roman *Draconarius*, fourth century AD



This photograph shows the appearance of the Late Roman soldier when not serving on the field of battle. Our *Draconarius* wears no armour and has replaced the helmet with the popular and comfortable *pileus pannonicus* made of felt. Both the *sagum* and *tunica manicata* are magnificent examples of Late Roman military clothing: the first is pinned up on the right shoulder by a large brooch and shows very ornate *tabula*; the second has some nice examples of decorative *clavi* and *orbiculi*. The large waistbelt and the belt of the sword are very indicative of the most common patterns used during the Late Empire. Offensive weapons include a classic *spatha* and a *spiculum*: the latter replaced the *pilum* as the Roman heavy infantryman's main throwing weapon around AD 250. It was very similar to the contemporary *angon* used by Germanic warriors, having a barbed head and a long narrow socket or shank,

made of iron mounted on a wooden haft. The barbs were designed to lodge in the opponent's shield so that it could not be removed. The long iron shank prevented the head from being cut from the shaft. We can also see here what a *draco* standard looked like. As is clear from its name, it had the form of a dragon, with open wolf-like jaws containing several metal tongues. The hollow head of the dragon was in metal and was mounted on a pole, and it had a long fabric tube affixed at the rear. When used, the *draco* was held up into the wind, where it filled with air and made a shrill sound as the wind passed through its metal tongues. *Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme.*

Late Roman heavy infantryman, fourth century AD



This heavy infantryman is wearing an excellent modern reconstruction of *lorica hamata*, the most popular kind of armour used by the Late Roman Army. The Roman chainmail comprised alternating rows of closed washer-like rings punched from iron sheets and rows of riveted rings made from drawn wire that ran horizontally. These

produced very flexible, reliable and strong armour. Each ring had an inside diameter of about 5mm and an outside diameter of about 7mm. Up to 30,000 rings would have gone into one *lorica hamata* and the estimated production time was two months, even with continual slave labour at the state factories. Although labour-intensive to manufacture, this kind of armour, with good maintenance, could be used for several decades by a soldier. The helmet is of the classic and very common Intercisa-II model: as clearly visible, the Intercisa-type was the version of 'ridge helmet' with bipartite construction. The latter included ear-holes, while the quadripartite construction or 'Berkasovo-type' did not; some scholars, bearing in mind that earlier Roman cavalry helmets usually had cheek guards with a section covering the ears, have suggested that the Intercisa-type was used by infantrymen (as in our case) and the 'Berkasovo-type' by cavalrymen. The standard *bracae* are worn, together with the usual short boots made of leather, while over the chainmail we can see the peculiar *cingulum militiae* that distinguished soldiers from civilians. The offensive equipment includes a long *spatha* and the standard *lancea* carried by the majority of the Late Roman heavy infantrymen. *Photo and copyright by Contubernium Primum.*

Late Roman heavy infantryman, fourth century AD



This heavy infantryman, presumably a legionary, has the full equipment used on campaign: helmet, armour, greaves, sword and shield. The helmet, of excellent manufacture, is of the popular 'Berkasovo-II' model: note the simple but elegant decorations and the peculiar central ridge. The armour is a very heavy *lorica squamata*; the scales that made up this kind of armour could have rounded, pointed or flat bottoms with the corners clipped off at an angle. They could be flat, or

slightly domed, or have a raised midrib/edge. The scales were wired or laced together in horizontal rows that were then laced or sewn to the backing. Therefore, each scale had from four to twelve holes: two or more at each side for wiring to the next scale in the row, one or two at the top for fastening to the backing and sometimes one or two at the bottom to secure the scales to the backing or to each other. Protection of the torso is completed by red *pteruges*, while the lower part of the legs is covered by simple bronze greaves (with no decorations). The *tunica manicata* shows a clear Celtic influence, due to its decorative tartan designs, which were a quite popular alternative to the decorations made with *clavi* and *orbiculi*. The *cingulum militiae* and *spatha* are of the standard model, as well as the oval shield, which has the name of the legionary written on the back. Shields were made of solid planks and were painted with the distinctive emblem of each unit. *Photo and copyright by Fectio.*

Late Roman heavy infantryman, fourth century AD



This soldier is from the *Honoriani Marcomanni iuniores*, an *auxilia palatina* unit. As its

name suggests, it was formed by the imperial authorities by recruiting Germanic warriors from the Marcomannic tribes. The Marcomanni were a sub-branch of the Swabians who fought some major conflicts against the Romans during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. The name of this unit also contained the term *Honoriani*, which refers to the Emperor Honorius, who ascended the throne of the Western Empire in AD 395 after the definitive division of the Roman territories. The *Notitia Dignitatum* has a large number of units named after Honorius, in particular for the lists of the Western Empire, a clear sign that the western section of the *Notitia Dignitatum* was extensively updated after the division of the Empire in 395, because the eastern section still contains many units defined as *Theodosiani* or *Theodosiaci* (Theodosius being the last monarch ruling over the unified Roman Empire, which he did until 395). Quite strangely for an *auxilia palatina* unit, this soldier has the exact equipment of a heavy infantryman; the majority of *auxilia palatina* units were elite light infantry corps, but this was not always the case. The helmet, of good manufacture, is of the popular 'Berkasovo-II' model. The armour is a very heavy *lorica squamata* that is worn over a *lorica hamata* with short sleeves. The *cingulum militiae* has richly decorated bronze fittings, while the white *tunica manicata* has *clavi* and *orbiculi*. Note also the simple greaves. Offensive equipment includes a *spatha*, a *lancea* with the wooden part painted in two contrasting colours and a small knife. Around the neck of this soldier is a *torque*, the traditional metal ring that was extremely popular among soldiers having Celtic or Germanic origins. *Photo and copyright by Fectio.*

Late Roman heavy infantryman, fourth century AD



This soldier is from the *Septimani seniores*, one of the *legiones comitatenses* listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* as part of the *Comes Hispaniae* in the Western Empire. This unit, like many others of the Late Roman Army, originated as a detachment (*vexillatio*) from an existing legion. In this case, the origins of the unit are quite clear

thanks to its same name: the term *Septimani* shows that this legion was originally created as a detachment of the *Legio VII Gemina Felix*. The latter was stationed for a very long time in Spain, in what is today the city of León (named *Legio* by the Romans who founded it, since it was the base of a legion). The helmet is of the classic and very common 'Intercisa-II' model. The armour is a very good example of *lorica squamata*, worn in combination with leather *pteruges* having blue decorative fringes. Both the *cingulum militiae* and the scabbard of the sword are in an unusual tone of green. The large round shield clearly displays the distinctive emblem of this legion, while the *torque* is again a sign of this soldier's Celtic origins (northern Spain had long been inhabited by Celts). The round/oval shield of Late Roman legionaries was about 110cm high and 90cm wide. The *spiculum* has the wooden part painted in the contrasting colours of red and yellow. *Photo and copyright by Septimani Seniores.*

Late Roman heavy infantryman, fourth century AD



This soldier is again from the *Honoriani Marcomanni iuniores*, an *auxilia palatina* unit. We can see very clearly the dimensions and main features of the Late Roman *lancea*, which was light enough to be thrown just prior to contact with the enemy or could be retained for use in hand-to-hand combat. Apparently, judging from the primary

sources that we have, the heavy infantrymen of the Late Empire preferred using the *lancea* for close fighting; each soldier usually also carried two or three *spicula* that were to be used as throwing weapons. The wood shaft of the *lancea* could be painted in various colours to prevent rot, but this was not always possible under campaign conditions. The helmet, of excellent manufacture, is of the popular 'Berkasovo-II' model: note the simple but elegant decorations and the peculiar central ridge. The armour is a very heavy *lorica squamata*, used in combination with red *pteruges*. Defensive equipment is completed by a pair of bronze greaves, whilst the *cingulum militiae* and belt of the sword are of the usual pattern. The white *tunica manicata* has very simple decorations consisting of some *clavi* in purple-red. *Photo and copyright by Fectio.*

Late Roman *buccellarius*, fifth century AD



The *buccellarii* were mercenaries, mostly of Germanic or Hunnic origins, serving under Roman generals or rich landowners during the very last decades of the Empire. These soldiers were recruited singularly or in groups and were assembled into units that were under the direct orders of their employers. The term *buccellarii*

derives from the word *buccellatum*, a type of dry biscuit that was the ordinary ration of these mercenaries. With the arrival of the Huns in eastern Europe, some important Roman generals like Flavius Aetius started to employ hundreds of them as *buccellarii*. This soldier, judging from the lamellar armour, probably comes from an eastern Germanic tribe (like the Goths, who adopted this kind of protection for the torso from the peoples of the Eurasian steppes). The units of *buccellarii* did not have any proper military organization, but during the last years of the Empire they became better trained and equipped than many regular units. This soldier, for example, has a helmet of the 'Intercisa-II' model and lamellar armour of very good quality. The latter consisted of small platelets commonly known as *lamellae*, which were punched and laced together in order to be assembled in several horizontal rows. *Lamellae* could be made of metal, leather or horn; metal ones could be lacquered in order to resist corrosion or as decoration. Unlike scale armour, lamellar armour was not attached to a cloth or leather backing. This mercenary, except for the armour, has adopted all the equipment used by a Late Roman heavy infantryman, with *lancea*, oval shield (showing a nice Germanic emblem), *bracae* and *tunica manicata* with highly decorated *orbiculi*. *Photo and copyright by Contubernium Primum.*

Late Roman infantryman, fourth century AD



This soldier is from the *Felices seniores*, one of the *auxilia palatina* units listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* as part of the *Comes Hispaniae* in the Western Empire. The Latin term *Felices* occurs many times in the names of the units listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum*; it means 'fortunate' or 'fruitful'. The first of these two meanings is clearly

much more likely for a military unit than the second one. Generally, however, this term is always associated with another name in the *Notitia Dignitatum*; only the *Felices seniores* and *Felices iuniores* have no other terms in their denomination. This could suggest that the original unit of *Felices* obtained its name from that of an emperor, presumably a usurper who later fell from general favour (we have no historical trace of him). The helmet shown here is a perfect replica of the famous 'Deurne helmet', part of the 'Berkasovo-type' family of ridge helmets. The original 'Deurne helmet' has an inscription related to a cavalry unit of the *Equites stablesiani*, but obviously this kind of helmet could be worn by both infantry and cavalry. Like most of the *auxilia palatina* soldiers, this man wears no armour, but has the same round shield, *spatha* and *lancea* as the heavy infantry. The magnificent *tunica manicata* in red shows perfectly the decorative *clavi* and *orbiculi*. Note also the *cingulum militiae* and the fact that the soldier is not wearing *bracae* (he is probably dressed for summer). *Photo and copyright by Patrick Stritter.*

Late Roman infantryman, fourth century AD



This Late Roman legionary is in perfect marching order, with all his campaign equipment carried on the back. Everything is assembled in order to form a sort of backpack under the shield, while the helmet is suspended on the front of the torso. The personal equipment also includes a very simple but functional white canvas bag.

The soldier is wearing his *lorica hamata* with short sleeves, but has temporarily replaced the helmet with a *pileus pannonicus* covered with fur (a kind of headgear that was extremely popular, especially in the cold regions of northern Europe). The chainmail is worn over a *subarmalis*, a simple padded jacket that was worn very frequently under the armour. This gave additional protection in case the rings of the cuirass were pierced by an arrow or javelin; it was also a protection against heat (under the summer sun, the *lorica hamata* could reach high temperatures). The *tunica manicata* and *bracae* are quite simple, whilst offensive weapons include a *lancea* and *spatha*. Photo and copyright by Contubernium Primum.

Late Roman light infantryman, fourth century AD



This was the exact general appearance of the Late Roman light infantryman, with no helmet or armour, and personal equipment reduced to a minimum. The universal headgear of light troops, worn also by heavy infantrymen when not fighting, was the *pileus pannonicus*. This could be made with felt or napped wool; it could be smooth

or shaggy, low or tall. The cylindrical shape made this kind of cap very comfortable and easy to produce. It apparently started to be used during the early third century, also being adopted as a sign of distinction by civilian dignitaries. This pillbox cap was usually covered with fur, especially in the northern regions of the Empire. Personal equipment includes a canvas bag and the usual *cingulum militiae*. The simple *tunica manicata* in white has red *clavi*, while footwear consists of front-fastening short boots with integrally cut laces. The *bracae* are confined by simple puttees made with strips of cloth. The *sagum* (cloak) is pinned up on the right shoulder by a large brooch. The main weapon is a *spiculum*. *Photo and copyright by Contubernium Primum.*

Late Roman light infantryman, fourth century AD



Late Roman light infantrymen had very simple equipment and clothing, which made them easily distinguishable from other troop types. Archers and slingers were also dressed in a similar way, with no helmet or armour (to increase mobility and limit the weight of equipment carried). The *pileus pannonicus* of this young skirmisher is

covered with fur, while the *tunica manicata* is decorated with simple and embroidered *clavi*. Weaponry consists of two *spicula*, the heavy javelins that replaced the traditional *pila* used during the Principate. As an alternative to these, the light infantrymen of the Late Empire could also use a lighter model of javelin known as *verutum*. The shaft of the *verutum* was about 1.1 metres long, thus being much shorter than that of the old *pilum*. The point measured about 13cm, and each *verutum* had either an iron shank like the *spiculum* or a tapering metal head. In general, the *verutum* had a narrow armour-piercing head similar to that of the heavy javelins, though obviously with inferior penetration capabilities. Over time, it seems that the *spiculum* started to be used on a lesser scale; apparently it was also replaced by the *verutum* as the main javelin for the heavy infantry. *Photo and copyright by Septimani Seniores.*

Late Roman archer, fourth century AD



This modern reconstruction is a perfect example of how a well-equipped archer of the Late Roman Army looked: *pileus pannonicus* made with felt, *tunica manicata* with rich decorations consisting of embroidered *clavi* and *orbiculi*, a *spatha* of great quality, *cingulum militiae* in leather and Celtic *torque* around the neck. The main

weapon is a magnificent example of composite bow, which was made from horn, wood and sinew laminated together. The horn was on the belly of the bow facing the archer, while sinew was on the outer side of the wooden core. The wooden core gave the bow its shape and dimensional stability. When the bow was drawn, the sinew (stretched on the outside) and horn (compressed on the inside) stored more energy than the wood for the same length of bow. Hide glue was used to attach layers of sinew to the back of the bow and attach the horn belly to the wooden core. The animal glue could lose strength in humid conditions and quickly be ruined by submersion or rain: for these reasons, composite bows were always stored in protective leather cases (as that carried by this archer on his right side). Quivers were of two different models, one used by the infantry and the other employed by cavalry. The method used by cavalry to carry arrows for the composite bow showed a clear nomadic influence, because they were held pointing upwards in a barrel quiver (hanging from the waistbelt). Infantry quivers, like in this case, were round-bottomed cylinders hanging from a shoulder-strap (which hold the arrows point-downwards). In either case, a single archer normally carried thirty to forty arrows at a time. The main advantage of composite bows over longbows was their combination of smaller size with high power. *Photo and copyright by Jyrki Halme.*

Late Roman slinger, fourth century AD



During the Late Empire, the model of sling traditionally employed in the Balearic Islands started to be used alongside a new one, the so-called 'staff sling': this consisted of a staff (a length of wood) with a short sling at one end. One cord of the

sling was firmly attached to the staff, while the other end had a loop that could slide off and release the projectile. Staff slings were extremely powerful, because the staff could be made as long as 2 metres, creating a powerful lever. Ancient art shows slingers holding staff slings by one end with the pocket behind them, using both hands to throw the staves forward over their heads. The staff sling could throw heavy projectiles at much greater distance and at a higher arc than a traditional Balearic 'hand sling', and could be as accurate in the hands of an experienced skirmisher. This slinger, however, has preferred to continue using a traditional Balearic sling. His offensive equipment is completed by a *spatha*, while his torso is well protected by a leather *lorica squamata*. The red *tunica manicata* has *clavi* and large *orbiculi*, and the *pileus pannonicus* is covered with fur. The projectiles for the sling are carried in a small leather bag, hanging at the right side of the soldier. *Photo and copyright by Cohors Prima Gallica.*

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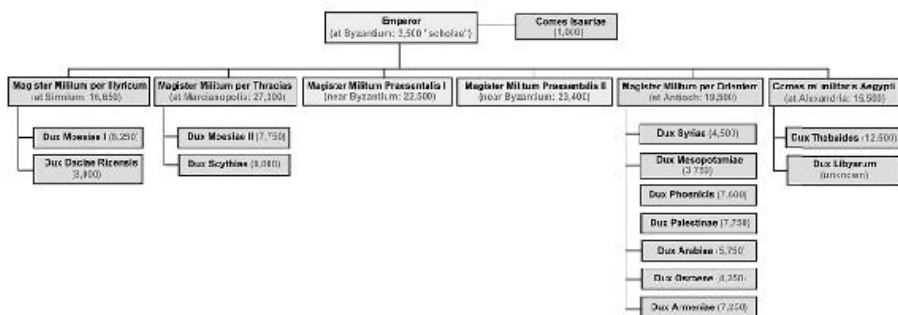
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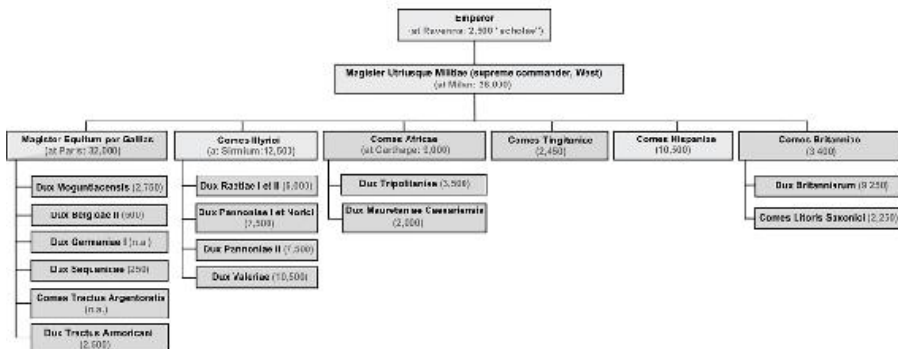
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HIGH COMMAND STRUCTURE OF THE EAST ROMAN ARMY (ca. 395 AD)



Structure of the Eastern Roman Army according to the *Notitia Dignitatum* . (Scheme by Wikimedia Commons)

HIGH COMMAND STRUCTURE OF THE WEST ROMAN ARMY (ca. 410-425 AD)



Structure of the Western Roman Army according to the *Notitia Dignitatum* . (Scheme by Wikimedia Commons)

The Re-enactors who Contributed to this Book

Cohors V Baetica Vexillatio

We understand Historical Recreation as the intention to show and reproduce a certain time of history in a didactic and comprehensible way to a large number of people, from the most absolute thoroughness based on research. The *Cohors V Baetica* recreates the period that passed from the military reform of the Emperor Diocletian until the end of the fourth century (AD 284-400). In that period, the Roman Army as a whole, and the infantry in particular, completely changed armament and strategy. The military recreation group forms a military unit that was widely used at the time, the *Vexillatio*; this is composed of troops from two army corps: *Legio VII Gemina* of the Spanish peninsula and *Septimani Iuniores* with a garrison in the province of Mauritania Tingitana. Its objective was the defence of both banks of the Columns of Hercules. The name of the group is based on the existence in *Baetica*, now Andalusia, of five *Cohortes* from the second half of the second century AD; this was demonstrated by a white marble pedestal found in Los Corrales (south of the town of Osuna) in 1971, on which a military unit is clearly mentioned. The reconstruction of materials that we make is based on an analysis and detailed study of each of the pieces. Our objectives are: contributing with novel or little-known elements to the panorama of the Spanish and European historical recreation of Late Antiquity; creating thorough and detailed investigation of the sources that are within our reach on the military and civil history of the period in question, trying to contribute with new ideas on it; transmitting these researches in a comprehensible and attractive way for different kinds of public audiences. The group has a civil investigation section, which recreates the elaborate costume of the ladies of the time that would later influence what has been called Coptic and Byzantine style. We also carry out anthropological research of female and male religious cults. The group also carries out reconstructions of military and civil archaeology. In the absence of historiographical references confirming the continuity of our unit, our historical research focuses on

demonstrating that at no time until the fall of the Western Empire (and even later) was Baetica an unprotected province of the *Hispaniarum Diocese*. *Cohors V Baetica* is a legally constituted association registered in the Junta de Andalucía, with reserved image rights and legalized before the Ministry of Finance of Spain. The legal rights of the photographs of the group belong to Doña Inés Navarro Mesa and Doña Isabel Espada Muñoz. Any alteration or illegal use of said images could lead to a complaint in the Spanish courts of justice and similar European ones.

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Detail of the *plumbatae* carried on the back of the shield. (Photo and copyright by *Cohors Prima Gallica*)

Cohors Prima Gallica

Cohors Prima Gallica is a cultural and no profit association that dedicates itself to the study, reconstruction and diffusion of the history and cultural heritage of the Roman era; in particular, we focus on the period of the Late Empire, from the end of the third century to the

beginning of the fifth century AD. The group was founded in 2002 in the Basque counties of Spain, and since that time it has been very active in participating in important events of historical re-enactment and collaborating with various institutions (museums, centres of historical reconstruction and public organizations). This intense activity of divulgation, based on expositions and conferences, has contributed in a significant way to the diffusion of knowledge in the fields of history and archaeology of the Late Roman Army in Spain. In particular, the activities of re-enactment of the group are focused on a military unit that was garrisoned, during the fourth and fifth centuries, in the city of Iruña-Veleia in Trespuentes (very near to the modern Vitoria-Gasteiz). This unit is the famous *Cohors Prima Gallica*, from which the group takes its name. Our association, thanks to an intense work of study and research, reconstructs in a philological way (with great accuracy and using scientific methods) the dress, equipment, combat tactics, manoeuvres and weaponry of a Late Roman cohort. Military re-enacting, however, is not the only activity of our group: civil re-enacting is also very important for us, since we reconstruct objects used in the normal life of Late Antiquity and several civilian activities of the time. This part of our work includes reconstructing religious ceremonies as well as the different productive activities taking place inside a Roman villa of the Late Empire.



Classic Balearic sling with different kinds of projectile. (*Photo and copyright by Cohors Prima Gallica*)

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Contubernium Primum

A *contubernium* is the smallest organizational unit of the Roman Army. It stands for a group of soldiers sharing a tent, a mule and/or other equipment. More than that, it is a symbiotic community on a military or civil base. Such units are not just found in the army; they were also used for groups of mercenaries (the so-called *Buccellarii*) for landlords, merchants, officers and other rich people looking for private safety. This is exactly what the *Contubernium Primum* represents. Settled in the late fourth to early fifth century, this group portrays ordinary soldiers with light equipment as well as experienced veterans with their expensive and complex gear. But the group does not just focus on military kits; civil equipment also plays an important role. The group uses a holistic approach, in order to show both sides of the coin: this makes its demonstrations vital and spirited. Look in the bags and pouches of our soldiers and you'll find all the minutiae of ordinary life: from dice and fire starters to combs and razors, and also fishing hooks – everything recreated as authentically as possible. In addition, traditional food and recipes are used when living in the field, and cooking is done in contemporary pottery or cauldrons. Most reconstructions are based on findings in the Rhine/Meuse area, where the Frankish tribe of the Ripuarians was living during this time. Depending on the condition and completeness of artifacts, some interpretation is necessary to recreate the required objects or textiles, using both scientific and non-scientific publications, especially when lacking specific objects. The rest comes from the experience of the group members, learned on long, cold and wet marches with full gear in winter time or fighting under the boiling sun when invited to Mediterranean countries. As most members have been involved in reenactments for around twenty years, a huge amount of know-how and practical knowledge has been gathered to improve our level of expertise, but there's always more to learn.

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Modern reconstruction of *manuballista*. (Photo and copyright by Cohors Prima Gallica)

Fectio

Fectio was the name of a Roman *castellum* located along the Lower Rhine, currently in the Netherlands. Once home to both a large cavalry unit as well as a naval base, its significant military importance diminished after the tributary river it guarded shifted its base further to the west and the harbour silted up. Eventually the fort was abandoned and the site was lost for about fifteen centuries. Although hardly anything remains of the fort, the name lives on in a small hamlet; it is never completely forgotten. By the Late Roman period, the Roman military presence along the Lower Rhine was a difficult one. Allied Germanic groups were settled in areas once guarded by the Roman *auxilia* units and most of the *castella* forts were either abandoned or given over to civilian settlement. However, the Roman Army still made its presence felt from time to time, shoring up the border, allowing tribes to settle or evicting them, and taking up volunteers from Germanic groups who chose to settle just inside or outside the border. The abandoned *castellum*, still close to the Rhine and astride the military road alongside it, may well have harboured the Roman Army during such expeditions well into the mid-fifth century. Although one can never exclude the possibility that the last unit occupying the *castellum* was dispatched elsewhere, history does not reveal its fate. The name of our unit, *Fectienses Seniores*, is a made-up one used to honour our local history as well as for simple convenience. The modern soldiers of the *Fectienses*, choosing to seek

their ancestors among the Romans as well as the Germanic settlers, portray the life and equipment of the period from the late third to early fifth century AD.

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Felices Seniores

The *Felices Seniores* are a re-enactment group from Germany, which has the aim of producing a high quality representation of the Late Roman period (in particular the fourth century AD). Our representations cover both military personnel from the Late Roman Army and many different civilian characters, ranging from craftsmen and women to state officials. To achieve a high quality in our equipment, we try to produce as much of it as possible ourselves, based on evidence from both archaeological and historic sources. At the moment this includes nearly all of our clothing, parts of the leatherwork (including some boots) and some of the armour and weapons. Some of these crafts can be seen live at the events we take part in. For these events we work together with museums and other dedicated re-enactment groups. Our tours over the last decade have taken us to several extremely beautiful museums, including Old Sarum in England, Carnuntum in Austria and Marle in France. If you are interested in following our path re-enacting the Late Roman era, feel free to contact us.

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Septimani Seniores

The *Septimani Seniores* group was formed with the aim of spreading knowledge about all aspects of the Roman world, with special attention to its army and with particular emphasis on the late period of the Western Empire (fourth and fifth centuries AD). To accomplish this task we carry out intensive research of all available sources of information (archaeological, epigraphic and iconographical) and the results obtained by other re-enactment groups. The group is also involved with the research and reconstruction of documented items as accurately as possible. The results are published in various ways,

depending on which audience we address; perhaps the most important of our activities is broadcasting knowledge to a general audience. Our representations are made in simple and understandable language, including several dramatisations to help people understand the usage of military equipment and tactics. *Septimani Seniores* participates in some of the best historical reconstruction festivals in Europe, such as Tarraco Viva in Tarragona (Spain), Marle-Aisne in France, LRE in Holland and Carnuntum 333 in Römerstadt Carnutum (Austria).

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The typical meal of a Late Roman soldier, including the *buccellatum* (a type of dry biscuit that was the ordinary ration of mercenaries). (Photo and copyright by *Contubernium Primum*)